# MAUD BINGLEY.

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BY FREDERICA GRAHAM.

"She has a hidden strength."—COMUS.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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# MAUD BINGLEY.

## CHAPTER XXII.

"And there danced she, who from the leaven
Of ill preserved my heart and wit.
One of those lovely things she was
In whose least action there can be
Nothing so transient, but it has
An air of immortality.
Her ball dress seem'd a breathing mist,
From the fair form exhaled and shed,
Raised in the dance with arm and wrist,
All warmth and light, unbraceleted.
Ah! none but I discern'd her looks,
When in the throng she pass'd me by."

*The Angel in the House.*

AT last the day came for leaving London. Lady Louis Crichton had put their journey on and off, and changed her plans so many times, that Maud did not venture to write to tell Julian where they were going till the very morning of their departure. She thought beforehand she had a great deal to say

to him, but it ended in a very short and rather stiff note being dispatched to Captain Murray, which, when it was sent, the writer would have given a great deal to be able to recal and amend.

The first person Maud saw on the pier, when they reached Ryde, was her brother Edgeworth. He walked up to her quite as coolly as if they had parted but yesterday.

"Well, Maud, who would have thought of finding you here?"

"Dear Edgeworth, I am so rejoiced to see you again; why have you never written? I was almost afraid you were gone. Herbert went to Grindly's only yesterday, and could hear nothing, but that they had not seen you for a month or more. Where have you been?"

"I am here now, which is all that signifies."

"And by which mail shall you go? Oh! how glad I am we came to Ryde after all, instead of going to Cowes."

"You are not going to see me off," said Edgeworth, doggedly, "so you need not think it; I'm not so fond of tears and lamentations as you are, Maud. But I say," continued he, "who is that monstrous fine woman Herbert is helping up the steps. It's not Sophia the aunt, is it?"

"Oh no, that is Lady Louis Crichton."

"The deuce it is, and where did you fall in with her, I should like to know?"

"At Bankside," was the prompt reply. "She was there at the time of Julian's accident, for Ascot races, I mean," said Maud, correcting herself.

"And you made up to her, and got brought down here in consequence?"

In absence, Maud, forgetting Edgeworth's rough, rude ways, had remembered only the more rare occasions when he had demonstrated some little affection for her, and was wounded to the quick by the manner of his reception.

As for him, he neither perceived nor cared for her discomfiture, but went on. "You must get her to ask me to dinner, for if her ladyship feeds as well as she dresses, she is worth cultivating."

"We are to stay at the Hotel to-night," began Maud, "but, Edgeworth, you are not going away?" added she, for the moment they reached the pier gate, he turned of in a contrary direction.

"All right," said he, coolly, and off he went without another word.

Whatever her place of sojourn, Lady Louis Crichton liked to be always before the world. She took her house upon this principle, and to the

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"I thought I should be sure to find you here," was the remark he added to his greetings. Her partner hurried Miss Bingley on, and Captain Murray, though he looked after her a minute, resumed the conversation he had interrupted. He was not five yards off, yet Maud hardly knew whether it were pleasure or pain which filled her heart almost to suffocation. Julian looked very ill; he had the listless, languid air of a man who has not yet recovered strength or energy, and despite his moustache and whiskers, his face seemed almost effeminately delicate beside the sunburnt, manly complexions around him. It would not have been Maud had she not, now she had her wish, and he was come, felt anxious and troubled, lest the day's journey and late hours should do him harm.

She had the happy faculty of taking in every available point of observation, without appearing to stare, so, though her partner thought her struck with sudden silence, he did not discover what was the object that engrossed her thoughts. Julian did not once glance her way, nor was he taking his usual part in the conversation, he stood listening, and looking straight before him with a certain contraction of his dark brows, and a gnawing of the nether lip, which betrayed to Maud that his

thoughts were far away and not pleasantly engaged either.

It was not a good or pleasing expression which rested on his handsome face, and though she had seen it before, and knew its meaning well, it had never been there for her. She wondered what had happened, whether he were ill or annoyed, and, true woman, longed to comfort and console.

There was something of this wistful feeling probably in the smile with which she passed him once more, or perchance Julian read somewhat of reproach in the eyes doubtfully raised to his, for he followed her into the ball-room, and came up with her as she took her place in the quadrille. There was hardly time for two words, but brief as they were, Maud was happy again, at least for the time being. But joy is an imperfect sensation, it never lasts long enough to justify our secret anticipations, or if it does—which is rare enough—the ecstacy of happiness is broken in upon, or dwindles down into every-day contentment, before we know the value of that which we have had within our grasp.

Maud believed she was quite content, as she watched Julian walking slowly round the crowded room, and, rather to the detriment of her partner,

could not help noting his smiles, listening for his tones, and conceiving an interest in every person he addressed, whoever they might be.

Even this diluted species of pleasure was not to last. The quadrille was over, and in the general move, she lost sight of her object, and then came a strange restlessness and impatience of feeling, which at last merged into intense bodily weariness. Her numerous partners were quite a weight upon her spirits; she did her best to respond to their efforts to entertain her; but her mind refused to take any interest in the thin topics of the day, and at last it came to a very sincere longing to go home.

Lady Louis Crichton's ideas of the duties of a *chaperon* were peculiar to herself. It was quite enough she thought to know that Maud was dancing with the best men in the room, she troubled herself no more about her, and it would have required a more practised ball-goer than Maud to mark down and follow the fair coquette's changing, wandering fancies. She very seldom danced herself, it suited her better to sit still and preserve her complexion and dress alike intact and unruffled; but it was very seldom that she took up a position among the dowagers, or wallflowers. She was never stationary till she found a comfort-

able position in an ante-room, corner, or in an arm-chair, and there she would sit out the revels.

It was so long since she had found Lady Louis, that Maud began to think she must have made Herbert take her home, for neither were to be seen, and she was meditating under whose sheltering wing, of all her casual acquaintance, she had best take refuge, when, being hustled into a corner of the ball-room for the Lancers, she found herself almost touching Lady Louis and Julian.

There was an expression on the face of the former which betokened mischief, the latter was looking grave and out of spirits.

So it appeared was Maud, for Lady Louis attacked her directly for wearing a woe-begone countenance, but it did not require that to fix Julian's eyes upon her.

"You have danced more than any girl in the room. What is the Roc's egg, Maud?" said she.

The vagaries of the dance, which surely must have been devised by some one smitten with the principle of perpetual motion, saved Maud all need of concocting an answer.

The next pause Lady Louis touched her with her fan. "Maud, did you know you were a beauty before to-night? Tell the truth."

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She did not pretend to answer this time, but turned back to her partner, who, hearing as well as herself, could not but admire the suave, graceful manner of her silent reproof.

At every opportunity her tormentor renewed the jest, in one form or another, not for the sake of teasing Maud only, but because she had a vague idea that Julian did not quite like it; and from this amiable motive, after the last figure, Lady Louis playfully bid Maud "sit down and tell them what conquests she had made."

An indignant "Ada!" and a scornful motion of the pretty head was all Lady Louis gained.

She went on.

"I mean to send a list of the victims to Mrs. Murray, so it's no harm telling tales to you to begin with," said she, addressing Julian.

Maud tried to look unconcerned.

"First there is Sir George Vanston. Go where we will, he always follows; I believe he came to Ryde solely on Maud's account. He looks things unutterable, but he is not given to speaking, and, as it happens, I can interpret the devotion, he can't comfortably put into words; he was very much in love with me once."

When Lady Louis began to talk in this wild

strain there was no knowing what she would say next, and Maud was in despair.

"Then there is that fair boy with twenty thousand a-year," continued her ladyship. "Let me tell you, Captain Murray, your cousin will have nothing to say to the officers from Parkhurst; military men are far beneath her notice. Now I confess, I am foolish enough to look upon every soldier as a possible hero."

Lady Louis never forgot to bring herself in, and in the best possible point of view, nor did she fail to remember that Captain Murray had no small love for his profession.

"With two brothers in the army? I don't understand that," said Julian, looking at Maud as he spoke.

"Nor do I plead guilty to all the sins Lady Louis charges me with," said she, quietly.

"Hush! hush!" exclaimed her ladyship, "or I shall tell about Captain de Haviland."

Maud coloured up directly, and for the life of him Julian could not help saying, "Well?" in a tone calculated to lead to further revelations.

Lady Louis did not want much encouragement to proceed.

"Why, he made a declaration in form," said

she, "and this young lady will have nothing to say to him. He is not rich now, but he has very fair prospects. I did my duty, I assure you, Captain Murray, and laid all the advantages and disadvantages of the match before her to the best of my ability."

"I do not know which ought to be the most ashamed, you, Ada, or I," said Maud, with an effort to speak coolly and calmly. "My only excuse is that I had no idea anyone could be so foolish, as to think of such a thing, after only a week's acquaintance."

"He wrote to me about it at the end of two days," resumed Lady Louis, by no means pleased either with Maud's indignant tone, nor to observe that it was she who occupied Captain Murray's attention.

It was not for this her ladyship spoke, on the contrary, by making a stalking-horse of Maud she meant to mask an attack on Captain Murray, on her own behalf. She had succeeded, inasmuch as for the last two hours she had kept Julian by her side; but it was provoking to see each shaft she launched fall short of the mark, and worse still to suspect that an unharmed adversary was winning a silent victory.

"I beg to observe, moreover, that the acquaintance was none of my making," continued she. "Guilty, Maud, guilty! you may as well acknowledge it. Don't you see it in her face, Captain Murray?"

Captain Murray had stood up, for Maud was sitting on the other side of Ada Crichton. He twisted his moustache and smiled as he looked from one fair face to another.

"If it comes to confessions, I suspect I should have two culprits to deal with instead of one," answered he, with a gesture of mocking deference.

"Come, Maud, that is Kœnig's old 'Post horn,'" he continued, as the brazen refrain of the galop woke up the ball-room's dying life. "I must have one turn, if you will condescend," and he bent towards her.

She rose a little reluctantly, and he remarked it.

"Lady Louis, do you remember that ball in Sussex given by poor —— on his coming of age? Kœnig composed that for the occasion, I fancy. You would not condescend to dance with me then, a new-fledged cornet."

"Is that the reason you have not asked me to-night?" said she, recovering her good humour.

"I should have received the same answer, very

possibly," said Julian, in his most courteous manner—a manner, whose mingled softness and deference, won more for him than even his good-looking face. A severe thing, if he gave it utterance, lost its sting, though it might keep its point.

As they walked away, Maud said: "I don't think you ought to dance."

His answer surprised her. "According to some people, one ought to do nothing pleasant;" and something in his manner prevented her seeking any explanation.

"Where is Herbert?" asked he, the next minute.

Maud pointed him out, standing disconsolately in the doorway.

"Matters are going badly for him, to judge by appearances," soliloquised Julian. "In point of fact, life is nothing better than a game of cross purposes; no two people are agreed as to what makes happiness," and he sighed.

Maud was just going to inquire into the origin of this new school of philosophy, when they came up to her brother.

"Herbert," began Julian, "do go and make yourself pleasant to Lady Louis, there is a good fellow; we have left her all alone."

Herbert's handsome face cleared in a moment.

"He has made up his mind," remarked Julian, with emphasis; and without another word he whirled his partner off, nor would he let her stop till Maud was fairly panting for breath.

"Oh Julian!" she exclaimed, for when they did pause, he was pale even to his lips.

"Never mind." It was all he said, and she wondered what made him so unlike himself; besides, he was looking at her so earnestly, that she felt the colour burning in her cheeks.

"I can't stand this atmosphere, let us go into the other room," said he, the next minute.

He led her out upon the landing, and back into the tea-room, now nearly empty. Apparently he did not choose to pass Lady Louis and Herbert. Julian was evidently in a restless, uncertain mood, for when he had found her a chair, and brought her some tea, he remained standing, though there were innumerable seats vacant.

Maud was beginning to see something was terribly amiss.

"I hope you do not believe Ada Crichton's nonsense," she began.

"I believe what I have been told more than once this evening, that Miss Bingley is the prettiest thing in Ryde."

The blushes which had been coming and going ever since she had seen him so suddenly, flushed even the swan-like throat, and soft, white shoulders. There was wounded pride and pain, too, in the words with which she interposed.

"That is all very well for strangers, but—"

"Forgive me; it was too bad," interrupted he, still he was not angry, as she half feared, for he took his place beside her.

"Now tell me," and his manner changed to one of almost womanly softness, "who is this Captain De Haviland?"

"He is in the Artillery," was the prompt reply, "and was a great deal with Arthur before he was ordered off to the West Indies."

"Lady Louis said nothing of that," commented Julian.

"Captain De Haviland knew Arthur very well," continued Maud; "he even had a letter by the last packet, when I had none."

"In a word, friendship for the brother ended—how was it, Maud?"

She did not speak willingly, but he wrung it from her at last—a disjointed confession.

"I never knew he had written to Lady Louis; I never dreamt of such a thing."

Julian smiled. "I conclude she espoused his cause."

"She thought that in time—"

"Did you?" He turned upon her almost angrily.

"Oh no! not if he had waited years instead of days," said Maud, answering his earnest look rather than his words.

He cooled down again, and asked quite quietly: "Did Herbert know of it?"

"Yes."

"What advice did he give?" He was questioning like his old self, and she answered as naturally.

"Oh! Lady Louis talked him over. He did not care at first; but Edgeworth was terribly positive. She told them both."

"They were all against you, then?"

"Yes, they all said the same; all kept repeating he was Arthur's friend; and really he was not unlike him, in manner I mean, still—"

Julian would not help her, and she went on speaking with some agitation.

"I knew I had no home; I knew Arthur would be pleased; I knew all that they told me; that Mrs. Murray would be glad; and—"

"And what?" he repeated, in a low, subdued tone, and keeping his eyes averted.

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"Thanks, no! I'll have a cigar with Herbert." He was himself again now.

During their short drive home neither lady spoke.

"Maud, this is your first ball, shall you remember it?" said Ada Crichton, as she bade her good-night.

It was hardly likely Maud should forget.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

"This lady? I would sooner trust the wind
With feathers, or the troubled sea with pearl,
Than her with anything. Believe her not."

BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER.

CAPTAIN Murray had kept within what may be called the letter of the law. He had made no declaration, he had won no avowal of love, he had abstained even from seeking one token of regard; As the world judges, he had acted honourably and uprightly.

Neither did Maud blame him. The bright, peaceful dream was passed, the shadow had taken its place, but youth, and hope, and faith were strong within her; she relied on Julian, believed in him, loved him with all the sublime truth, all the entire confidence, and—must it be said?—with all the blindness of an absorbing passion.

It was hard to bear; but yet the restraint which

gradually crept over voice, look, and bearing, seemed natural; they were never alone, always surrounded by watchful eyes, yet ever and again some glance, word, or gesture, would reassure Maud's heart, and scatter to the winds of heaven the strange, heart-sickening forebodings, which, in the interval, would obtrude unbidden, and clamorously claim a hearing.

She would not allow herself to be jealous, as was Herbert. He chafed visibly at every mark of preference accorded to Captain Murray by the lady of his love; there was nothing to take umbrage at in Julian's conduct, for half the times they were offered, Captain Murray did not accept the seat in the carriage, or avail himself of the privileges with which, as an invalid, Lady Louis chose to invest him. What Maud did envy was the coolness with which her fair ladyship would engross Captain Murray's conversation, and the ease with which she would summon him to her side, and keep him there, regardless of the very indifference, which provoked Herbert.

One Sunday the storm, which had been smouldering, burst forth. Maud had long expected it; indeed, there were times when she fancied Lady Louis studied how she might most wound and

vex Herbert, and show her independence, by acting in open defiance of his expressed wishes. Certainly she did everything that could provoke a quarrel; he remonstrated, and she laughed at him; he implored, but it was to no purpose. Maud really began to think Lady Louis was acting systematically, that she wanted to be rid of the lover she had trifled with, to be quit of an engagement by which she had never meant to be bound. A few weeks back, and Maud would have braved Herbert's prohibition, and besought the co-operation of Julian himself; she still thought him all-powerful, but it was different now. The sentiment, which since then had found for itself a name, had made her shy and reserved in addressing him; and sometimes she thought that he, too, drew back from any occasion for those old confidential talks, and was at some pains to avoid all approach to their former unrestricted intimacy.

She did not blame him, but it was on him the wrath of both her brothers turned. Herbert, who had once been so friendly, quite changed his manner towards Julian, and, in his quiet way, was cool, and almost repellant; he was too gentlemanly to contradict and argue, as Edgeworth did on all occasions. He was so rude and bearish, that

Maud thought that Julian must resent his marked incivility, and lived in fear of dinner-time, when he daily joined the party in Brigstocke Terrace.

Lady Louis Crichton had given both brothers a general invitation, and extended the same to Captain Murray; but these appointed hours of meeting were a pain and grief to Maud. Julian was sure to give some offence, which had its result in Herbert's entire silence, and Edgeworth's increased ill-humour. Evidently Captain Murray did not know what to make of the state of affairs; nobody could have suspected from Ada's manner that Herbert had any claim upon her; and he was so desponding, not to say dogged, in his supposed rival's presence, that he gave no occasion for suspicion of the real state of the case, by any lover-like attentions. It was like dwelling on the brink of a crater, looking down and waiting for the eruption.

Maud knew the *dénouement* must come, and she dreaded it; but the quarter from whence it arose, and the form and fashion of the severance, were anything but that she had anticipated; if she had been forewarned, she had hardly believed it possible.

It was an autumn Sunday, and the rain had fallen fast all the morning; it ceased in the after-

noon, but still the sky was dark and overcast, the wind high and boisterous, whistling piteously through the sashes and along the passages of the summer residence they occupied.

The weather had been an excellent excuse for Lady Louis to stay at home in the morning. She always went to church once a day in London, for no better reason than that she had a seat in a very crowded church, where they were difficult to get, therefore much to be desired; whither, too, all her acquaintance went, or where, at least, she knew everybody by sight; where, too, when she heard "a sober, righteous, and godly life" upheld, or the duties of the rich, their temptations, and perils set forth, and felt how far different was the selfish ease, and sensual comfort of civilized affluence, she could find consolation in joining a party cry, and take comfort in the idea that she put no faith in forms and ceremonies. It is so satisfactory to say people "go too far," when we do not like to follow in the steep and narrow path.

At Ryde it was another phase of the same thing. The congregation were principally strangers, the service long and monotonous, and, worse still, the preacher, not content with "reasoning of righteousness and temperance," was prone to bring

all the powers of his mind and imagination to bear upon the unpleasant topic of Death, and, after that, the Judgment, when, as did of old the auditor of the apostle, the modern lady "trembled," and, like him, too, laid the same styptic of "a convenient season," to her awakened conscience. Lady Louis, accordingly, found out she "liked no extreme of party," and kept away from church upon all and every pretext.

Maud had got her bonnet on, and Ada Crichton was comfortably established before the fire, when Julian came in.

"Surely you are not going to church this wretched afternoon?" was her ladyship's salutation.

"It has left off raining."

"But it is damp, and wet, and miserable; nothing is so rash as sitting in a cold church, after walking through the mud. Take my advice, Captain Murray, and stay with me; I have got something like a sore throat myself."

"I did not go this morning, on account of the weather," remarked Julian, speaking to himself.

"And you never did such a thing before as skip church altogether, I dare say," laughed Ada.

He never had absented himself a single Sunday since his illness, but the habit was new, not strong.

"I was just saying to Maud," continued Lady Louis, "that I do not think religion consists in externals." It was a high-sounding phrase, just the sort she liked to pick up and use without reference to the corollary. "Now she must needs go, rain or shine, ill or well. She got wet through this morning, and, not being particularly strong, I fully expect she will be laid up to-morrow."

"I wonder where Herbert is," interposed Maud; "he promised faithfully he would be here."

"Edgeworth came to fetch him," said Ada; "and they both are probably at this moment safe in the smoking-room, at the Club."

Maud went into the back drawing-room, looked out at the weather, came back, and, glancing at the clock, said, "I must be going."

"Not alone?" said Julian, who, meanwhile, had been seduced by a most tempting arm-chair.

"It won't be proper for you to go with her," remarked Lady Louis, archly. "We all know what walking with cousins ends in. This is a gossipping place, too."

Maud was gone before the last words had passed the mischievously smiling lips. As she ran down stairs, she fervently hoped Julian had not noticed the conscious colour, which flew into her face.

Poor child! she was not physically, if conscientiously strong. In the martyrdom of her womanhood, and the strength of her principles, she could do what she thought right, at any sacrifice; it was not so easy to speak. A single word would have weighed in the balance, and established Julian on the side of right; but she could not, literally could not utter it, no! she loved him too well, too fervently, too intensely, to dare to speak, to venture to brave the animal spirits, the affluence of life, which gave vivacity to Ada Crichton's personal attacks.

Julian rose hastily, he was more than half disposed to follow.

"I believe, after all, you are dying to go," laughed Lady Louis.

It was enough, he sat down directly.

"I should so like to ask one thing," said she, looking up archly, "if I dared."

"How long have you been afraid of me?" was the answering question.

"Oh! you can knit your brows, and look thunder, like Mr. Murray, when you choose."

"Thank you."

"I conclude your mother must have been handsome, for you have none of your uncle's features," continued she, carelessly, not at all as if she meant

to flatter; but Julian was quite sensible of the implied tribute to his good looks, and retorted by a broader compliment than he would have dared to pay Maud.

Lady Louis took it in very good part. She was looking her best that afternoon, and she knew it. She did not at all dislike to have her own opinion corroborated; and it would have been hard if she had produced no effect, considering the care and thought with which she had dressed that day. Her loose black velvet jacket suited her somewhat angular shape; the white habitshirt, which it admitted into view, was of the freshest and finest, its every plait and fold just as much studied as the rosy-tinted ribbons, which enlivened the dark dress, helped out the lace of a most coquettish head-dress, and were finally repeated upon the slippers, just visible upon the fender. Ada Crichton's feet were like her figure, thin and straight; but she knew exactly how much to display of the worked silk stocking, and embroidered petticoat; and, as somebody had said once, more wittily than goodnaturedly, "she understood exactly when and where nature and art should meet together."

When people study a part, they generally play it well, and all the better that their feelings are

not interested. Maud's beating heart would have forbidden her taking half the pains Lady Louis did to raise Julian out of the apathetic mood which was on him. She would have died, as the phrase goes, to please him, but she would not have dared persist and force her way, through the frost of reserve and courtesy, which had lately come upon him. Lady Louis had no scruples; and when she had worked him up to a proper point, she reverted to her first idea.

"Now tell me, when you were ill, how much did you flirt with Maud? She is so silent about you, that I am quite suspicious."

Few women would have put the question so broadly and openly. Lady Louis was not actually coarse in her conversation; but neither discretion, delicacy, nor womanly feeling ever stood between her and her object. She wanted to know the exact state of affairs between Maud and Julian; she did not care for him in the least; she neither appreciated the good, nor discerned the evil in his character; but she had been used all her life to look upon him as in some sort belonging to herself. Mr. and Mrs. Murray, she was well aware, had planned their marriage years ago; and Julian, as a boy, had admired her, followed her, and wor-

shipped her, as a boy is apt to do a handsome woman older than himself, and versed in all the arts of society and attraction. He was but a boy, and she had not valued his admiration; but when staying at Bankside, with nothing else to do, it had amused her to dazzle, stimulate, and excite his rivalry of others, his pseudo passion for herself. She had played the same game at intervals, and on many succeeding visits, till it came at last to be diamond cut diamond; but now, after having lost sight of him for two or three years, she found that the old feeling, when she would have liked to revive it, had dwindled, in the interim, into the most complete indifference on his part, almost, she fancied, into contempt. At this moment she was hardly mistaken when she fancied she saw this last gleaming in his eye, heard it in the tones of his voice.

"I should have thought you would have known her better, Lady Louis," said he, quite coolly. "I should have fancied by this time, you would have discovered, that with Maud Bingley everything must be fair and above-board."

"As it happens, I don't understand her in the least," persisted she, not losing her manner, or betraying either resentment of his tone, or any knowledge of the irritation she had aroused. "I

should have thought it the most natural thing in the world, under the circumstances, if her heart had succumbed. Somebody holds that fortress, I am certain; I wish it had been you, for she is a dear good little thing, with all her vagaries."

"I should like to hear your reasons for both these assertions."

"In the first place, she would have nothing to say to Captain De Haviland, who was really a very good-looking, agreeable person, and I should have thought him quite good enough to please her; strict to a fault, I should have said."

She paused, but Julian was evidently waiting to hear more.

"And, in the next place, I call her going to church so perpetually, her strictness, and her punctilios, very inconvenient, to say the least of them. I know it is a sort of fashion among girls now-a-days, but I don't see that they are any better than people who make no fuss about religion."

It was not to herself only, that Ada Crichton worked woe by her light, careless words. A woman who acts upon no principle, who acknowledges no restraint but the lax laws of society, whose only religion is fear, and whose rule is that of

ency, is not the best companion in the world
nan blindly struggling with conflicting mo-
who had not yet learnt " to refuse the evil,
choose the good."

attered little to Ada Crichton what oblations
er, what earnest intercessions for one loved
than life, were being poured out the while
l's altar by the fond heart, whose value it
r pleasure to depreciate. If all the world
onest and true, or simply did unto others as
ould others should do unto them, so many
hopes would not prove vain delusions, such
tears would not be daily shed upon the grave
happiness, the ashes of a lost love. It is
sibly that retribution comes to those who
t nothing to cut the golden thread of an-
destiny; if the punishment is proportioned
sufferings they cause, it must be heavy
; and the many innocent victims of selfish
groundless jealousy, or a trivial spite, may
with bowed head, offer up petitions for
ies, persecutors, and slanderers." Assuredly
tter, though the flesh quiver, and the heart
to suffer than to cause suffering; the tear-
harvest may not be reaped here; the day-
ay be invisible, while the grief is new, and

the struggle at its height; but the light which shines from Heaven falls not forward into the dim future, but backward upon a past, which meets its full answer only in after days—days that are yet to come.

When, the service over, Maud left the church, Herbert and Edgeworth were lounging up and down the street, waiting for her.

"Where is Julian?" asked the former, directly they joined her.

"Ada persuaded him it was best to be prudent, and to stay in-doors."

"With her?"

"Yes."

It was Edgeworth who spoke.

"If I were you, Herbert, I would not stand such conduct. There's this fellow, Murray, in and out of Brigstocke Terrace at all hours of the day."

"Lady Louis has known him ever since he was quite a boy, and she is so much at Bankside, it would be strange if they were not intimate," said Maud, who was beginning to be aware that Edgeworth led their elder brother by the nose.

"I don't care a rush! All I know is, I would not allow a good-looking chap like that, to be sitting all church-time with the woman I meant

to marry. It's not a chance thing, he is always hanging about."

Herbert made no comment; a lowering cloud was on his brow, he gnawed his lip angrily, and again it remained for Maud to speak.

"Edgeworth, I really think you are labouring under a misapprehension."

"Misapprehension? what do you mean? The Captain's cutting in, and Herbert will get kicked out, see if he don't!"

Edgeworth was never particularly choice in his expressions. His *répertoire* of phrases was quite that of a schoolboy, and it was only before strangers that he chose to put the smallest restraint upon himself. His roughness, and his slang, had been an old source of dispute between himself and Arthur, who always did his best to prevent his domineering over their sister. Maud was more than half afraid to contradict him in his present mood, but knowing of old his capacity for stirring up strife, she persisted.

"I am sure you are mistaken; Julian and Lady Louis are hardly friends, still less—" she did not quite know how to finish her sentence.

"I thought you said just now they had always been very intimate," sneered Edgeworth. "They

may take you in, Maud, but I have eyes in my head, and, depend on it, there is a deeper game going on, than we see on the boards."

Maud was very strong in her denial, but Edgeworth bore her down by the vehemence and temper of his assertions.

"Perhaps you think the fellow likes you," retorted he, rudely; "but you were never more mistaken in your life. Lady Louis quite takes the shine out of you."

Maud's tell-tale blushes did not escape his notice. She was excessively annoyed, but not silenced, as Edgeworth expected.

"It is not a question between Ada Crichton and myself," said she, calmly. "It is Herbert whom you are rendering causelessly uncomfortable."

"I tell you what," remarked Edgeworth, who was a genuine bully, "if I find this fellow has been trifling with you, I'll horsewhip him within an inch of his life. The blackguard! he is quite equal to playing two games. I hate your soft-spoken, would-be swells."

Surprise, indignation, terror, a thousand conflicting feelings kept Maud silent, while tears of wounded pride and anger rose to her eyes.

"If I were Herbert, I would turn him out of

the house at once," continued Edgeworth. "I would not stand it at any price."

Maud was fairly roused.

"Your counsels are very valiant," said she, endeavouring to speak calmly; "but it would be as well to remember that Captain Murray is not only a gentleman, but a soldier."

"Ha, ha!" laughed Edgeworth; "I thought you were very anxious about him; I see how it is. I'll not fail to let him know my opinion."

Maud was white with anger.

"Herbert," said she, "why do you allow Edgeworth to speak in this way? I am his sister, and must bear with him I suppose; but he has no right to say such things of Ada, or—"

Distress prevented her finishing her sentence; she kept back her tears, but it was all she could do to prevent their gushing forth.

"Come, come!" said Herbert; "I am the person to be annoyed."

Maud could not think he was the only sufferer, but she held her peace. She was almost past speaking, but one thing more she must say.

Edgeworth began again.

"Now I come to think of it, there was some palaver going on between you and that fellow, the night of the ball."

"Don't attack her, Edgeworth," interposed Herbert; "it's no use, and it only makes her unhappy; I don't want to drag her into the affair."

All this discussion had occasioned a considerable *détour* in their walk home. They had now reached the end of the terrace. Maud stopped, and, gathering up all her energies, said:—

"You are wrong, Edgeworth, very wrong; you are sowing dissension between Herbert, and one who is his sincere friend."

Edgeworth was interrupting her rudely, but she went on before he could say more.

"It is useless to argue the point, I know, but remember one thing, I have received much kindness at Bankside; any quarrel with Julian stands between me and my home—must have effect with Mr. and Mrs. Murray. I would die, rather than be thought ungrateful. Anything that you or Herbert do, must redound upon me."

"That is your look out, if you choose to live with such people," snarled Edgeworth. "I was saying to Herbert, only the other day, you were quite spoilt."

The remembrance of the sad, sorrowful days when she had first arrived at Bankside, days uneventless and hopeless, or worse, only marked by

Mrs. Murray's bitter courtesies, and Herbert's chilling neglect, rose up at these words, but Maud would not retort.

"We ought never to have made it up with the Murrays," continued Edgeworth. "It was all Arthur's nonsense; but I shall tell the Captain a piece of my mind before I have done with him, and then it will be all up with you, Maud."

He had worked himself up into such a state of irritation, that he hardly knew what he said.

"Have done, Edgeworth. What is the good of harping on this subject? it is anything but pleasant," put in his eldest brother, feebly.

"Herbert," said Maud, tremulously, as they reached the door, "if you have any regard for me, or love for Ada, let this alone; a quarrel of this sort can only do harm."

"Come on," called Edgeworth, who was standing sulkily at the end of the terrace.

Herbert stood irresolute.

"You are coming to dinner, at all events?" said Maud.

"I don't know that I am wanted."

"Come, pray come," pleaded she.

"Herbert!" shouted Edgeworth. "Herbert!"

He turned on his heel, and his sister went slowly

in-doors. As she passed the drawing-room door, Maud heard a voice, she knew only too well, say:—

"How you do misunderstand one."

She did not catch the answer, as she passed swiftly on, but it was a woman's soft voice which spoke.

When Lady Louis came up to dress for dinner, she looked into Maud's room.

"Where have you been?" said she. "I have won some gloves from Julian, he vowed you would come in to tea."

Maud was standing before the glass, combing her long hair, which half concealed her face.

"I have been lying down," said she; "my head ached."

There was a pillow outside the bed, damp and wet with tears.

"Julian dines here, and I suppose your brothers come too," remarked Lady Louis.

"Herbert did not say he would not," but the door was shut. Ada Crichton did not hear the doubtful tone, and would not have cared if she had; she was troubled with no misgivings as to her own powers of attraction.

Maud was dressed, and sitting in the twilight drawing-room, when dinner and Captain Murray

were announced together. Lady Louis had not yet made her appearance; and after a careless question or two as to when she returned, and whether she had met Herbert, Julian said hastily:—

"Have you written to Bankside lately, Maud?"

"Not since you came; I only write occasionally; but I owe Mrs. Murray a letter, I am ashamed to say," answered Maud.

"In your next, then, do not say anything of my being here."

"Not say anything?" she exclaimed, in surprise.

"No, I had given up all idea of Ryde, and now I shall not stay much longer, so there is no need to chronicle my comings and goings," said he, hurriedly. "I've had enough of comments on my conduct, I—"

What he was going to say in addition never appeared, for Ada Crichton came in.

"Are we to wait, Maud?" asked she. "Will Edgeworth ever forgive me, if we are a course in advance?"

"I do not think he will be here," rejoined Maud.

"Herbert is always late," remarked her ladyship.

Dinner progressed but flatly. Two unoccupied places looked drear, and nobody except Lady Louis

felt much disposed to talk, while at every pause she fell back into surmises, as to the non-appearance of the Bingleys.

Maud attempted no excuse, could offer no palliation for the marked rudeness of her brothers' absence. She could only tell that they had walked with her from church, and had left their re-appearance doubtful.

The bright lamp told tales, as she sat vainly trying to eat, and showed a dimmed, dull complexion, and very heavy eyes, eyes too sad and downcast to catch the anxious glances Julian perpetually cast in her direction; who, besides, rendered her all the little courtesies of the table with an earnestness, which would not have particularly pleased Lady Louis, had he not, on the other hand, exerted himself to talk, and to occupy her attention with other things.

Ada, not too susceptible or suspicious, declared Maud had taken cold, installed her on the sofa when they went up-stairs, and decided in her own mind, that such a delicate, desponding little creature was the last wife in the world to suit Julian Murray.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

"She might have gone on talking half-an-hour,
And I stood still, and cold, and pale, I think,
As a garden-statue a child pelts with snow
For pretty pastime. Every now and then
I put in 'Yes,' or 'No,' I scarce knew why.
* * * How she talked
To pain me! woman's spite!—You wear steel-mail;
A woman takes her housewife from her breast,
And plucks the delicatest needle out,
As 'twere a rose, and pricks you carefully
'Neath nails, 'neath eyelids, in your nostrils,—say
A beast would roar so tortured,—but a man,
A human creature, must not, shall not flinch,
No, not for shame."

AURORA LEIGH.

NOTHER rainy day. Nobody could go out; and it appeared nobody thought it worth while to brave the weather, and come to Brigstocke Terrace. Lady Louis yawned, walked from window to window, said the sea made her melancholy, wondered why people ever punished themselves by going to the seaside, and finally wished herself back in London.

She would not allow Maud to read, yet marvelled how she could sit and work by the hour together; and at last, late in the afternoon, having discovered the fire made her very hot, went up-stairs, and betook herself to trying on a new dress, Nanette was busy making for her.

Maud was writing her letters in the back drawing-room, when the door bell rang; she thought it might be Herbert; it could not be Julian this wretched day; a footstep made her heart beat; the door opened, and Captain Murray walked quietly in. He looked round for Lady Louis, and, seeing she was not there, after standing a minute irresolute before the fire, came up to the table where she sat.

Times were changed; he was embarrassed now to find her alone; and Maud, who with a heavy heart had been keeping up the semblance of being at ease all day, was actually the least nervous of the two. A few remarks, and she was silent. It really did not seem worth while to draw forth only laconic answers about the weather, so she resumed her occupation, or rather began to fold and seal her letters.

Julian stood watching her for some time, and then said: "Have you written home?"

"No." She did not add that it warred against her sense of truth and honesty, to write a letter and say nothing of his presence.

Probably he guessed it was something of the kind, for he went on: "I have, so you can say what you please; it will be some time before I go to Bankside again."

His tone was desponding, and she looked up inquiringly.

He was idly tearing some paper into strips, and evidently expected her to speak; but Edgeworth's animadversions were taking effect, and she was silent. If she had kept her naturally warm, sympathising manner, and shown the interest in his movements he expected, and she felt, it had been better for both; but though Maud defended him to others, she was angry with Julian herself; and, taking example by the proud and reserved heroines of divers novels, who, though they sound very grand on paper, would be very disagreeable and ill-tempered in real life, she would not ask him a single question.

Ada Crichton would never have been so foolish. If she were fretful, peevish, and discontented in private, and made Nanette's life miserable, she always put on her smiles with her *piquante* dress,

and appeared the picture of sweet temper and good humour in society. She knew these are qualities, to which men not unreasonably attach immense importance; they will forgive a hasty ebullition of anger much sooner than a manner which makes them feel themselves wrong.

It was not unlikely that Julian knew he had given Maud great cause for provocation, but none the less did he look and feel disappointed when she showed herself resentful. He had made a great effort, exposed himself to possible annoyance in deference to the sense of truth which he knew to be an integral part of her character, and she made no response. Ada Crichton's strictures on Maud's principles and opinions recurred unpleasantly to his mind; and not much more agreeable was the recollection of some remarks, she had further made on the Bingley temper and temperament.

"By the way, what is the matter with Herbert?" he asked.

She answered his question by another.

"Have you seen him?"

"Yes, both last night and this morning. He was in his room when I went back to the Pier Hotel yesterday evening; he was busy writing,

and I could hardly get a word out of him. He was not much more communicative this morning; however, he condescended to tell me he was off to Southampton, and I saw both him and Edgeworth struggling through wind and rain down the pier."

"To Southampton! Edgeworth gone too?" ejaculated Maud, in a tone that sounded vastly relieved.

"So it seems, and I rather think change of air may be beneficial to the last-named gentleman," remarked Julian, dryly. "At all events, it is to be hoped on his return he may be a little more amenable to the common courtesies of society."

"I wonder when they will be back; I wonder whether it is business about Edgeworth's passage, that has taken them away," repeated she, anxiously.

"I asked, but got no answer. Edgeworth was not on speaking terms with me this morning. Yes, by the way, he did condescend so far as to tell me, when he came into the billiard-room, that I was a fool, and couldn't play."

"It is only his way," pleaded Maud.

"Is it his way to make his sister cry, and look ill and wretched for a whole twenty-four hours?" inquired he.

Maud held down her head.

"It is very foolish of me to be worried; I ought to know better."

"What was it all about, Maud? for I see Herbert is very low."

"You must not ask me."

"I know I have no right," began he, then coloured, and turned away abruptly; he did not like being refused her confidence; that of late he had done nothing to win it, did not recur to his recollection.

Like a good many other sweet-tempered people, Julian took it greatly to heart when things went wrong. His last week at Bankside had not been a particularly pleasant one; nor was the remembrance of his own conduct, under what had been a very untoward and annoying circumstance, at all calculated to salve over his wounded dignity. Halting between two opinions is never very satisfactory, still less is it a wholesome frame of mind; and besides being in this uncomfortable predicament, Julian enjoyed the conviction of having put himself quite in the wrong, and behaved very ill. For once in his life Mr. Murray had been temperate and cool; his nephew had kept all the violence and loud wordy wrath to his own share; he had come away in a huff; and his letter of to-day, though

seasoned with the spirit of defiance, was the only olive-branch he had as yet chosen to hold out. He would gladly have been put on good terms with himself again.

Ada Crichton, who came down just when she was not wanted, was the very person to do it. What with surmises, suggestions, and questions, she had arrived at a very just idea of the state of the case. Too wise to betray her knowledge, she acted on it, and unwittingly Maud played into her hands. From the day Edgeworth spoke of Julian as "trifling with her," she became a changed being. She shrunk from his every advance, even his very notice had become painful to her; and the silent tokens of his regard, she had thought all the dearer because unmarked by others, assumed a new and most painful aspect in her sight. She grew distant and reserved towards him, and avoided all occasion for the little cares, which, even since their intercourse had been marked by a feeling of restraint, Julian had never ceased to render her. She kept out of his way, and, as it seemed, would rather do anything, talk to anybody and everybody, than be thrown into contact with him, and Lady Louis helped her to carry out this new system. She was worldly wise enough to know that to her who

shows a real passion, an irresistible fascination, an almost divine grace is lent; experience had taught her long ago, where she herself failed, and warned her that the love felt *by* was much more to be feared than that felt *for* a rival. If Maud had testified one half of the affection which filled her heart, one iota of the deep, wild worship, she poured forth in silence and in solitude, the whole world combined had not separated Julian from her.

The week was passing slowly. No letter from Herbert; no tidings of either of the brothers. All that Maud could ascertain, was that Captain and Mr. Bingley had paid their bill and taken away their luggage, but left no orders with the master of the hotel about letters, whereof two or three were awaiting them. He augured thence they would return; not so Maud: but she kept her conviction to herself, being hardly on terms now with Ada Crichton, to talk to her unreservedly about Herbert.

Lady Louis, on her part, kept up the semblance of regard which she had all along professed for Maud, and Maud bore it, as she was learning to bear other things, with the silent endurance which is not always resignation; but these days of studied indifference, guarded words, and repressed emo-

tions, were days also of fever and turmoil inexpressible, and before they were over, Maud wrote to Mrs. Murray, and asked whether she might not return home. She would end this suspense, whatever it might cost her.

When Ada discovered what Maud had done, she was very prettily indignant.

"Nonsense, Maud! you will stay at Ryde as long as I do, and so I shall write and tell Mrs. Murray. You will see I shall indite just such a letter as will carry the day; I know the Bankside tactics better than you do."

"Very possibly," was the answer. "I am quite ready to acknowledge my ignorance; I often find myself wrong, without knowing why."

Lady Louis laughed.

"Ignorance! innocence, you mean; I begin to think it possible to be too guileless. But take my advice, Maud; don't attempt to run counter to Mrs. Murray's schemes."

Maud was not much the wiser for this speech; but it is not pleasant at twenty-two to be called "innocent" and "guileless," so she asked no questions, and her *soi-disant* friend was quite ready to go on.

"The truth is, Maud, you ought to marry. At

the time, I thought you foolish to refuse Captain De Haviland; I think you still more unwise now."

The crimson flush that followed on this marked and meaning speech, told Lady Louis all she wished to learn. It was a minute or two before Maud could still the pain at her heart, and command her voice to answer as calmly as she wished.

"I should have been miserable, married to a man I did not care for," she said.

"That is a delusion all girls labour under; and, mark my words, you will see its fallacy before very long. I know what men are."

"I know I do not like Captain De Haviland," echoed Maud, with an effort to seem cheerful and unconcerned; "at least, not well enough to have married him."

"Come, come, you were very good friends with him at first. However, he took his refusal in dudgeon, so he is done with; and now I am going to talk seriously to you about Sir George Vanston."

"Sir George Vanston!" repeated Maud, with a certain scorn in her tone and look, which Lady Louis thought to herself was very becoming. "His attentions, as you said yourself, are a sort of epidemic. It is me to-day, it was yourself yesterday, and will be some one else to-morrow."

"Oh! that is the way with most men, yet they all succumb when their time comes. I am sure he likes you, Maud; that quiet, unconcerned way of yours, takes with a man who has been run after as a good match, as he has been. Julian and I were agreeing, only yesterday, what an excellent thing it would be, if it were all settled here."

Had it been, "as I said to Julian yesterday," it would have been nearer the truth, though it had hardly answered Lady Louis's purpose so well. With cruel triumph, she watched the rosy flush die out on Maud's face, and a chill, cold pallor take its place. She did not faint, as Ada half expected, but worked on in silence, and her friend proceeded with her discourse.

"Let me tell you, Maud, Sir George has neither father, mother, uncle, aunt, or cousins to interfere with him; he can marry to please himself; which, believe me, is no small advantage."

"When Sir George Vanston enters on the subject," said Maud, indifferently, "it will be time enough to take these matters into consideration. My own opinion is, that such an idea has never crossed his brain."

"Then we will put it into his head," cried Ada. "His cranium is not overstocked, it is true, but

you have sense enough for both, Maud; and when you are Lady Vanston, I hope you will ask Julian and myself to stay with you; no fear of your flirting, and so I shall tell Sir George. He has a great horror of fast women," added Lady Louis, the spirit of a thousand coquettes dancing in her eyes, and playing about her mouth.

"Pray, Ada,—" began Maud, but Lady Louis, who felt her every speech a triumph, ran on.

"I should so like to see Mrs. Murray's face when your engagement is announced to her. I shall be a proud woman that day, it will be all my doing."

"I shall never marry either Sir George Vanston or anyone else," said Maud, with an agitation she could not altogether suppress.

"It's all very right and proper to say so before a man has proposed," rejoined Lady Louis, quite ignoring the feeling with which this was said; "but I do hope, when it comes to the point, that you will be wiser. The question is simply this, which is likely to hold the best position? Lady Vanston, with a home of her own, and a very sufficient income, or Miss Bingley, with—" she interrupted herself. "Maud, I don't want to pry into the secrets of the prison-house, but I should

not imagine that it was happiness to live at Bankside, or with Mrs. Murray."

Maud's lip trembled.

"It was not a matter of choice with me, when I went there," she said, in a low voice.

"Well, believe me, to be loved is far better than to love," resumed Ada. "I have seen more of the world than you have, and I honestly think that, once married to him, you might be very happy with Sir George Vanston. He is exceedingly good-tempered, and very good-natured; you would be a little bored with his music, perhaps; but, on the other hand, you would have quite your own way; you might set up schools, visit the poor, and play the Lady Bountiful to your heart's content. That would be quite in your line, Maud."

"Of all miseries, a marriage without love must be the greatest," soliloquised Maud.

"Nonsense!" cried Ada, petulantly. "I had no notion you were so sentimental. Julian said—" she did not finish her speech, and, though longing to know, Maud did not dare ask what had been said. It might kill her to know, she thought.

Lady Louis walked to the window, where she stood silent for a while. When she did speak, she was still drumming with her long thin fingers on

the panes, and, as her voice betrayed, by no means in the best of humours.

"I believe you are in love; and I perceive, too, you mean to keep your own secret. I ask no questions, I only give you this advice; if you are not actually engaged, accept the first man who asks you. You will do it sooner or later, or you will wish to have done so, which is the same thing."

"Never!" said Maud, emphatically.

"You know best, of course; and if you can say that a year hence, well and good," was the apparently careless response, but there was something of acrimony in the tone in which the fair speaker went on.

"You may have the game in your own hands, for aught that I can tell; I naturally cannot pretend to judge of a matter, of which I know nothing."

Maud was not either to be won, or taunted into confidence. Setting aside other considerations, the sentiment which Julian's dying state had called into life, was too sacred to be shaped into words, too deep and holy a thing to be profaned by the worldly, babbling comments of a frivolous, cold-hearted woman. Love was a word which had a

far deeper meaning for her, than for Lady Louis Crichton; but it was to no purpose she tried her best to give the conversation a less personal turn; Ada clung pertinaciously to her subject; and, had it not been one which touched Maud so nearly, she might have found something to study in the strange compound of shrewdness and selfishness, which every word exhibited.

There was a little truth, and a great deal of what passes for worldly wisdom, in all Lady Louis said. She would hardly have admitted to herself the motives upon which she spoke; for, like many others, the ideas in which she indulged, would hardly have borne to be reduced to a form of words, or to be taken as a principle of action. It would have been the greatest possible relief to her, if she could have talked Maud into an engagement with anybody whatever; for she liked her well enough to have some compunction with respect to her own conduct, as regarded Julian Murray; though she was not scrupulous enough to be above impugning the sincerity of mankind generally, and leaving Maud to apply it particularly if she chose. It was at him she was talking, and so her victim knew perfectly well.

"Never believe a man till he has asked you to

marry him, Maud," persisted Lady Louis, forgetting she had just been advocating a very different line of conduct; "the world may gossip, and give you to one another, he himself may appear to be of the same mind, but it all goes for nothing; curates and country bumpkins marry for love, but a man of the world, though he likes to think himself a victim to the tender passion, requires a great many other things besides."

"Which is the reason so very few marriages turn out happily, I suppose," answered Maud, who was beginning to see the end and aim of her friend's harangue.

"Possibly; but there are other things worth having, besides hearts," retorted Ada; "but at two-and-twenty, I know it is half the battle to fancy oneself in love."

"To be so is, I rather suspect, the secret of the happiness so many people miss," persisted Maud; "and, what is more, I am sure if any wife were to expend as much pains in trying to please after her marriage, as we see women take before their engagement, there would not be so many sad tales to tell; there would be fewer bad husbands and miserable women."

There was a meaning in these words, Lady Louis did not at all like.

"In plain English," she said, "you are going to be your husband's slave."

"I should ask nothing better," said Maud. "I do not call it love, which cannot give up everything for the sake of the one beloved."

"Love, love, love!" said Lady Louis; "I am sick of the word. I have a great mind to settle the question as far as I am concerned, and to marry directly."

"Herbert will, doubtless, be very glad to hear it," said Maud, coldly.

"Herbert!" repeated Lady Louis, with an odd sort of smile. "Herbert appears to have abandoned the field."

Maud did not enter into any discussion on the subject, as, perhaps, her ladyship expected, and Ada, who had returned to her seat near the fire, sat awhile in silence; at last she said:—

"Julian Murray is very good-looking, certainly."

Maud started, she did not know what was coming next.

"I suppose you know Mr. Murray has cast a covetous eye on my Scotch acres for many a long day."

"He was your guardian, was he not?" said Maud, who felt herself obliged to speak.

"Executor, or trustee, or something of the sort; he and my father were very great friends. My land marches, as they call it in the North, with his, the two would make a very fine property, if united."

She had said quite enough, and not too much, in case there existed, as she sometimes suspected, a real and definite understanding between Julian and Maud. Every word she had uttered might be construed generally, and in that case would do no harm. Julian was a strange being, Maud inconceivably reserved and silent; so Lady Louis laid the flattering unction to her soul, that where no confidence was given, no quarter was to be expected.

## CHAPTER XXV.

"The vain coquette each suit disdains,
And glories in her lovers' pains."

GAY.

"I may not say that thou wert false,
I never had one vow from thee."

L. E. L.

AN expedition to visit the Royal Yacht had long been talked of, but, as Lady Louis Crichton did not particularly fancy sailing, it had never hitherto been carried out. Just now, however, picnics, balls, and other gaieties, were at a stand still. Pheasant shooting, and projected visits, had carried away the greater part of the particular clique with whom Lady Louis principally associated, and, doubtless, she herself would have followed in their train, had she not other projects on hand.

Captain Murray talked of leaving Ryde; but he was so languid and undecided about his plans, as in everything else,—this seemed the result of his illness—that so long as each day's work was laid out for him, the chances were he would not take his departure.

Lady Louis Crichton liked organizing a party, and this was to include everybody she knew, she having beguiled a noted member of the R. Y. S. into placing his yacht at her disposal, a luncheon and dinner on board being included in the programme of the day's entertainment.

Accordingly it was a goodly company of the "best society," which flowed over the sides of the Royal Victoria and Albert, and flooded a regal sanctuary with their gay presence and gleeful voices; and it was in a Queen's bedchamber that Maud stood and moralized, marvelling whether it were wealth, caste, or custom, which had intervened to separate Herbert from Lady Louis, and now stood between her, and what she naturally and inevitably had learnt to love. Others might envy their Sovereign Lady her state, splendour, possessions, and dignity; but there was one gentle heart which secretly dwelt more on her happiness as a woman than as a monarch, thought of her longingly as one resting in the love of her youth, a mother whose children might stand round and call her blessed, a wife, who, with the world and all its glory at her feet, could yet concentrate her heart on household joys and fond domestic ties.

Thanks to the numbers this day present, and the

absence of Sir George Vanston, Maud enjoyed a solitude which she had not known for weeks; on such an occasion, silence passes as suffering, and the plea of a headache is allowed as another name for a malady to be felt, not described. Sitting far away from the gay knot, near the helm, Maud heard nothing of plans or projects, and did not know that on leaving the Royal Yacht they were proceeding, as fast as an adverse tide and falling wind would allow, towards Southampton. Suddenly there was a cry raised to keep clear of an enormous steamer which was sweeping grandly down the Solent. All on board the little vessel flocked to the side to see the stately ship pass on; only Maud remained where she was, and by the advice of an old sailor, and with his help, climbed upon a coil of rope to see her pass.

"She's an Indy steamer, Miss, the outward-bound mail by Gibralter, Malta, and Alexandria; they'll be down Channel, and far on their way, or ever we're back at Ryde, I reckon."

Maud made no answer. Two figures had attracted her attention; was it fancy? could she be mistaken?

There was no time to think or reason; but just then a gust of wind caught the hat of the taller of

the two, he bent over the bulwarks in a vain effort of recovery. It was Herbert's face, and he was gone!

No one but the old weather-beaten man at her side heard the suppressed cry, saw the hands vainly stretched forth. Even he did not attempt to console her; he saw the face grow paler and paler as she strained her vision, never moving her eyes till even the line of smoke disappeared in the horizon.

"God help her!"

The man said it involuntarily; and with as little sanction of will the tears gushed out, which for days past had been resolutely pent back. It was his tone of pity which finally upset Maud's composure, anything but that; unkindness, severity, indifference. She leaned her head against the side of the vessel and wept out her loneliness, desolation, and despair, in a long and bitter flood of tears.

They were not dry on her cheek, when some one came and leant upon the bulwarks close to her. She felt who it was, though she did not look up or speak; nor did Julian question her as was his wont. His first words were an exclamation.

"I cannot believe now that Herbert is actually gone!"

She raised her head. "You saw him then?"

"Lady Louis caught sight of him, and I thought of you."

He spoke in the tenderest accent, and a look of inquiry from Maud sufficed to lead him on.

"She was startled, I must say; what she felt is another thing. It is difficult to guess at any woman's sentiments," he added, half gloomily, half jestingly.

Maud bent down her head again.

"He is gone! They are both gone—and gone without a word!" sobbed she.

He could not bear to see her grief, and he told her so.

A more studied effort at consolation would hardly have proved so effectual, but the true pity in his tone, the manly tenderness of his manner sufficed. Maud forgave him in that moment all the jealous pangs, the gnawing doubts, the maddening pains, which had been gradually usurping dominion over her—forgave him all—yet not in words, not outwardly, only from her very heart's core.

To a certain extent Julian understood her; but he did not know—few men do—how deep and wild was the worship of the heart, which cast itself down

at his feet, to be cherished, thrown aside and trampled on, and yet loving evermore.

It is not pleasant to accept it as a truth, but men do not love as women do; a thousand idle delights, and more idle pleasures—to say nothing of other tasks and other hopes—fill up the years from youth to manhood. They have so long played with the counterfeit, they scarce know the answering ring of the true metal. The gay weeds, the florid flowers, catch the eye; and often and often, it is not till it is too late that a man discovers he has passed by that, which would have made the happiness of his life.

Julian knew Maud liked him, but so did Ada Crichton; the one, to give him a passing second's pleasure, would have done all save sin, to have made him happy, would have forgotten everything in the wide world save her God; the other flattered his vanity, and besieged his senses; and Julian Murray is not the only individual, who has been bewildered by the unexpected anomaly, of finding his heart and passions at variance between themselves.

Maud's hold was upon the better part of his nature, and that the circumstances of the moment had called forth. It was to no purpose that Lady

Louis demanded Julian's advice and assistance; Captain Murray did not seem to take any interest in the facts submitted to his decision.

Like many parties of pleasure, this proved a failure. The weather had changed, and Lady Louis, never at any time the best of sailors, was determined to put in at Cowes. She took no heed of the wishes of her assembled guests; she did not care that dinner had been prepared on board; her object was to find herself again on *terra firma;* and after a great deal of discussion, it ended in the Captain's gig being manned, and a select party putting off for the shore.

Maud, of course, accompanied Lady Louis, so did Captain Murray; it had come on to rain, and it would have been wiser, perhaps, if he had remained on the yacht and gone below. Indeed Ada herself was not too ill to remind him of this; but it was not in the most amiable of tones; and certainly out of the dozen people who crowded the small boat and faced the wind and rain, not above two were in anything like a philosophic frame of mind.

Captain Murray required a tolerable stock of patience; for when they landed at Cowes, wet through, the hotel was full; and if such a result may be hinted at in so fair a being, Lady Louis

was fractious. With some difficulty he obtained the use of a sitting-room and a fire, where the ladies could dry their summer garments, and then he set off for the other quarter of the town, to search for something like a vehicle, to convey the whole party back to Ryde.

Maud would have remonstrated against his braving such inclement weather; but Ada Crichton was determined to set off home directly, and, as she said, "nobody but Captain Murray would act with anything like energy in her behalf."

Captain Murray looked more amused than flattered; and when from the bow window Maud had watched him round the corner, she saw no more of him till an hour after he returned the one solitary occupant of an immense omnibus, the only available carriage to be got. He had taken the precaution of going to the Club and borrowing a change of raiment from a friend; but Maud was not easy about him, for though he followed her into the furthest corner of the lumbering vehicle, to be away from the door, he still testified a consciousness of the driving rain, by a little hacking cough that nothing could still.

Lady Louis enjoined silence as a remedy; but no sooner were they fairly started than Julian com-

menced a whispered conversation with his neighbour, which lasted all through the journey; and in the deepening twilight, and amid the rattle of a not too easy conveyance, Maud arrived at the happy conviction that he was not estranged from her for ever, though upon reflection she would have been puzzled to assign a reason for his recent alienation.

Though Maud was quiet and calm now, Julian had not forgotten her distress.

"I have been thinking," he began, "that it is quite possible Herbert should return with the pilot."

"No," she sighed; "and though it sounds unfeeling to say so, I think he will be happier away. If he had only written to me!"

She spoke so sadly it was quite pitiful. Julian's answer showed that he remembered that their last was an unhappy meeting. He did think about her then.

"I fancy I can guess the motive for this sudden departure," he added.

Maud did not believe he could, but she would not say so.

"Poor Herbert!" continued Julian, "the only wonder is he lived on hope so long."

She did not know what account Lady Louis might have given of herself, or whether she had touched on the subject at all, it was enough for her, she thought, to speak the exact truth, so she answered simply:—

"He could not endure suspense; and I cannot blame him."

"Suspense!" repeated Julian.

She went on: "The most intolerable of all feelings; better to know the worst than to dread it."

She was speaking of Herbert, he was thinking of Herbert's sister. If he had asked her, Maud would probably, then and there, have told him how Herbert had been tried, but Julian made no further allusion to Lady Louis Crichton.

"Suspense and hope," said he, musing; "different words for the same feeling."

"Not quite the same; hope treads upon the heels of happiness, suspense is nearer to despair," she answered.

"In that case, I hope," whispered Julian, so earnestly, that even in the growing darkness, the colour burnt on Maud's cheek.

It was not immediately that he spoke again; when he did, Maud was quite taken by surprise.

"I have made up my mind," he said; "I shall

leave Ryde, and when you next see me, Maud, it will be at Bankside."

Possibly there was a little tremour in her voice, as she put the question, "Soon?" for he sank his to a whisper.

"Not just directly; but when I come what I have called suspense will be hope, or, better still, hope will be a well-tested certainty."

## CHAPTER XXVI.

"How many times it comes to pass,
That trifling shades of temperament,
Affecting only one, alas,
Not love, but love's success prevents.
What if my pole-star of respect
Be dim to others, shall their 'Nay,'
Presumably their own defect,
Invalidate my heart's strong 'Yea.'"

*The Angel in the House.*

MAUD went back to Bankside. She had little to regret in leaving Ryde. The morning which brought her Mrs. Murray's permission to return so soon as she thought fit, also saw a note laid on the breakfast-table, containing Julian's adieux. He told Lady Louis Crichton what Maud knew before, that he was going to rejoin his regiment, which had unexpectedly been ordered to move from Hounslow, and take up their quarters at Canterbury.

His defalcation disturbed Ada infinitely more than poor Herbert's abrupt departure; for, as Maud

had just learned from a letter of farewell, the joint production of the two brothers, and penned in all the softness of immediate departure, Herbert had previously written to Lady Louis from Southampton, had explained the motives which prompted so strong a measure, had pleaded for the one decisive word, which would either make him the happiest of men, or banish him for ever from home and country.

Lady Louis Crichton wisely kept her own counsel on this point. She spoke with seeming candour of both herself and Captain Bingley as victims to a mistake; they had found out their error before it was too late, and, as she remarked to Maud, the less said about it the better. After all, the brothers had chosen to go together, and there was no need of any explanation to the world in general; in plain English, she would hardly have liked Captain Murray to have been enlightened as to the part she had played in this matter.

Maud was too sad for recriminations, too sorrowful to enter upon any discussion of the facts, which had driven her last remaining brother to seek, in another hemisphere, a balm for wounds, Lady Louis now as completely ignored, as she had carelessly inflicted. Edgeworth, she knew, must in-

evitably have left her; Edgeworth, she always knew, would take himself off after some strange, unaccountable fashion, so as to avoid a leave-taking; it was more than she had hoped after the outburst on Sunday, when she received the few lines he added to his eldest brother's epistle. He was quite gracious, or rather, it should be said, he meant to be so, in thus bidding her good-by. He informed her, moreover, she might write to him as often as she liked, and wound up by a promise "to look her up" when he came home for his furlough.

His sister could not get over the loss of Herbert; she could not be the same to the accomplished siren, who had robbed her of her brother, who, in her thoughtless coquetry, deemed it nothing to break either bonds or hearts. There might possibly have been mixed up with Maud's anger a lingering recollection of other ties Lady Louis had striven to sever, another heart she would fain have stolen away. At any rate, she was too sincere to pretend to any regret when the hour of parting came, too unworldly to conceal the disapproval, Lady Louis was not a little piqued at being unable to charm away.

Meanwhile her return was quite an event at Bankside. If Mrs. Murray would have owned it,

she actually looked forward to getting back a companion, who was always amenable and sweet-tempered, ever ready to testify an interest in all her pursuits and plans. Maud had won something not only by all her unselfishness, but by the innate principle which made her put away all recollection of petty slights, and annoying trifles, and behave as if they never had been.

When the letter arrived, which announced her coming all the way from Ryde by herself, Mr. Murray was in a tremendous fidget; he was hardly pacified by the postscript, which said that Bridget had promised to meet her on her arrival in London, and to see her safely off again for Windsor.

"It is too late to send anybody for her to Southampton; you should have thought of that before, Mrs. Murray. Here will the girl be travelling down from town all in the dark too; I don't like it at all; it seems like putting an affront upon her; something ought to be arranged."

And something was arranged. When the train dashed into the Waterloo Railway Station, and Maud was beginning to look with something like dismay at the gas-lamps, and foggy gloom, and secretly to wish she had asked Bridget to go with her all the way to Windsor, a figure presented

itself beside the porter who opened the carriage-door.

"I've been on the look out for you this half hour. Train late!" and though he made no demonstration of being glad to see her, or even troubled himself with the common formula of greeting, Maud knew Mr. Murray's habits well enough to be aware that he had been, to use his favourite expression, "kicking his heels about town," ever since noon, a diversion he particularly disliked, rather than let her travel down alone so late in the evening.

For all that, Mr. Murray felt very guilty when he saw Maud, and heard her say she was "so glad to come back."

She, too, was the first to allude to Julian's having been at Ryde, to speak quite naturally of his regiment as under orders for foreign service, and, from that moment, the old man relapsed into the most moody silence, from which no topic had sufficient interest to arouse him.

Mrs. Murray was not so reserved in her communications; and Colonel Kennedy, who had arrived that day in very deep mourning for his uncle, but in excellent spirits at finding himself left much better off than he expected, had the benefit of all

the comments which she did not dare venture on to her lord and master, who was by no means pleased with his own part in the affair.

She pretended to be very grand, and indifferent about Maud and her doings; but she was not at all above being gratified at finding an opportunity of letting fall that her niece had had a very good offer while at Ryde, for Lady Louis had kept her word, and informed Mrs. Murray of Captain De Haviland and his proposal.

Colonel Kennedy was not so much astonished as she expected, though he appeared rather pleased than otherwise, to find "Mademoiselle" had exercised the privilege of her sex and said "No."

"I thought Julian was very hard hit in that quarter," was the remark which followed on this announcement.

Mrs. Murray smiled.

"That has been put a final stop to, I imagine, from her being so ready to leave Ryde. You know he has been there?"

Colonel Kennedy inquired whether Mrs. Murray really thought "Mademoiselle" cared for Julian.

"She was very much gratified by his attentions, pleased, as girls always are, with the first man who makes them feel themselves admired.

You should have seen Julian's face when I told him so."

"Told him so?" echoed the gentleman.

"Yes," laughed Mrs. Murray; "I never in my life saw anyone so angry. Mr. Murray spoke to him one day on the subject after dinner; it was high time, for he was to join her in London, and wanted to follow her to Ryde. He came into the drawing-room and expected me to take his part. I soothed him as well as I could, for he was white and trembling with passion, but I took the opportunity of telling him a few home truths."

"You don't mean to say it came to Mr. Murray's interfering to prevent the marriage!" exclaimed Colonel Kennedy.

"Indeed he did," returned Mrs. Murray, not at all sorry to have found a topic to interest an unamusable man, "and it was not all too soon; for when the subject was broached, it appeared Julian had actually made up his mind to sell out of the army, 'and settle down,' as he called it, 'for life.' He had even brought himself to believe he should be quite happy at Fintore, and, I believe, expected his uncle to give up the place to him."

"Which proposal Mr. Murray negatived, of course."

"He would have given up Fintore to him gladly under other circumstances," said Mrs. Murray, evasively, who well knew how nearly this proposition on Julian's part had upset all her deeply-laid schemes; "but we do not wish Julian to choose a wife out of the family, as it were; and can you fancy anything so absurd as at his age to pretend that domesticity was the one thing wanting to his happiness?"

"It is a matter of opinion at what age a man ought to marry," returned Colonel Kennedy, now in his turn evading a direct answer; "but it is not every pretty woman who is content to be buried in the depths of the country, and out of the way of everything and everybody."

"He did not take his uncle's advice at all in good part; in fact I did not know Julian could be so violent," resumed Mrs. Murray; "that night he went to his room vowing he would go to town and propose the next day. He kept his word, inasmuch as he went; but it was a bootless errand, and he came back so low and subdued, that if I had dared I should have asked him if he had received his *congé*."

"Too sore a subject for a joke I can well believe," said Colonel Kennedy, "but I don't understand

why she would have nothing to say to him," added he, with the manner of one well-pleased to think it was so.

"No, no," said Mrs. Murray, with a sapient shake of the head, "she did not have the opportunity of saying yes, the fates favoured us there. Maud had left London that very morning, and I suppose Julian has thought better of it since; and though he has been at Ryde, I fancy he has steered clear of committing himself. Indeed I think Ada Crichton would manage better than to allow that; she likes attention too well herself, and I have a great idea that after all she and Julian will end by making a match of it."

Mrs. Murray could give a tolerably accurate sketch of the facts, but with the feelings which actuated Julian's present line of conduct she was very imperfectly acquainted. He did love Maud far better than she believed, or even than he himself was aware—loved her, not so much for her beauty, and girlish grace, as for the intense sensibility, the bright intelligence, the earnest nature, which when he was with her, filled him with a desire to be a better man, and to lead a better life than he had ever done before.

It was not one of those wild fiery passions,

which make wild havoc of a man's heart, but a gentler, holier feeling, which penetrating below the barren surface of existence, and safe from its noisy din, makes the happiness of a life, and we may humbly hope of an eternity.

If Mr. Murray had objected to Maud personally, all the chivalry and honour, the truth and tenderness of Julian's peculiar temperament would have been called into play, instead of the angry obstinacy and petulant ill-humour, with which he met his uncle's anticipation of his intentions regarding her. Considering it had been the object of Mr. Murray's life to add field to field, and to restore to his family its former possessions and position, he was wonderfully reasonable in all that he said and urged upon the subject of his nephew's marriage. This was more than could be said for Julian himself, who completely lost his temper, and as excitable people are apt to do, said much in the heat of the moment, which was inexcusable, and of which upon reflection he was heartily ashamed.

Lady Louis Crichton's name was not so much as mentioned; but Julian knew what his uncle meant when he said that his one wish before he died was, to see the old domain of Fintore what it once had been; but if Julian chose to marry Maud, this could

never be. The Murrays in former days had mated with the best and highest in the land; Maud was a good girl enough, but she had no connections, not a single relation who could help a man on in life, and if he married her, he must be content with his present prospects and condition, instead, as he had hoped to see him, the possessor of a considerable estate, and in a good position as connected with one of the best families in the country.

Mr. Murray was doing no more than many parents and guardians would have thought it their positive duty to do; but for all that his conscience pricked him unpleasantly, when he thought of Maud, and his natural integrity of disposition told him this was but a poor return for all that she had done at the time of Julian's accident. He was eager and keen as ever in recurring to old schemes for the aggrandisement of his family, and the elevation of his nephew; but his heart misgave him when he re-echoed his wife's sentiments as to the Bingleys being poor and penniless, and her many brothers making Maud a very undesirable connection. He knew he was wrong, he knew he was acting a cruel part towards an inoffensive girl, who had no one single relative likely to take her part, or to resent any advantage that might have been

taken of her youth and inexperience, and this kept him silent when Julian stormed on, and asserted his own right and intention to do as he pleased.

In proof of it, Captain Murray went up to town the next morning resolved to speak to Maud. Maud had started for Ryde, and then at last it suddenly occurred to him that if she were made acquainted with Mr. Murray's opinion on the subject, she would think it necessary, at whatever loss to herself, to abide by his uncle's decision. She was not the sort of girl to consent to act in defiance of those to whom duty was due; she would not think it right; he doubted whether she would accept, still less marry him under the circumstances, if he asked her.

This was anything but a pleasant reflection; and the idea that followed in its train drew a cold, creeping shadow over the future. If he were to relieve his own mind, and pour into Maud's ear his hopes, his fears, his wishes—if he honestly told her what had passed, what would be the result? She would never come back to Bankside, she would be too proud to remain an inmate of a family, the head of which refused to receive her as one of its members. He could not blame her, if it were so; she would be more than justified in resenting conduct, which was neither just nor generous.

Maud had no other home, and the end would be she would be obliged to go out to India with Herbert or Edgeworth. He knew the strength of her principles; she would neither waver nor hesitate, if so much as a whisper reached her ear of what had occurred; rather than sow dissension or be the cause of strife, she would leave England, and brave the fate, he was well aware she dreaded and abhorred.

Julian walked about the streets all that day, wretched and undecided. Those who met him said, "What a dreadful thing it was to see poor Murray, he was terribly altered by his accident!" And really it did seem as if Julian had not yet recovered the energy and activity, which before his illness had characterized him. He was just in that state of body which disposed him to regard both people and things from the most morbid point of view. He could not resolve on any course of action, or decide on what point to take his stand; whereas if he had had the strength of mind and resolution to look steadily at his difficulties, he would soon have discovered that the only hope of comfort lay in patience, and in a steady, consistent line of conduct.

If even now he had gone back to Bankside, and

told his uncle temperately, that, though he would not marry against his consent, he could not give up the hope of some day winning Maud for his wife; if he would have confessed the simple truth, that it was hopeless to ask her, unless it was with the full concurrence of one, who had stood to him in the place of a father, Mr. Murray would have been glad enough to find a pretext for yielding. He was very much put out by the scene of the night before, but was quite as angry with himself as with Julian. It was the first time the uncle and nephew had ever had a serious difference, and the old man was as much annoyed as the young one could possibly be, though he showed it in a different way.

He had been too much discomposed to go to town as usual, and had spent his morning in going over his accounts, and drawing up a statement of his affairs. There was no lack of ready money, the balance at his bankers was always in his favour; he was not living up to his income, and if his late partner's daughter still retained her share of the estate they had bought in the early days of Murray, Macmillan and Co's. prosperity, he could quite afford to give her a fair price for those poor acres of heather, not to mention that he had reason to believe, Lady Louis Crichton lived so com-

pletely up to her means, that anything in the way of an addition to her income would be very acceptable, even though it entailed the loss of an imaginary lover.

Mr. Murray was obstinate, but he was not hard hearted. Had the idea suggested itself to his mind, that if Maud knew of his disapproval, it would virtually close the doors of Bankside upon her, and throw her upon resources inadequate even to a bare subsistence, he would have been filled with as much dismay as Julian, who thought bitterly that, with all his boasted independence, with money at his command, and luxuries in his grasp, he could not stretch out a hand to help the being he loved all the better for her dependent and desolate condition, but rather it was his very love, which wrought her the cruel wrong of depriving her of the only home she had.

Uncle and nephew had better have made common cause, and taken their stand upon the manliness and independence, which in their secret hearts, each knew to be better than the borrowed importance, and reflected lustre of an unsuited marriage, instead of being influenced against their better judgment by the harpy in fashionable guise who sat at the head of the dinner table; but day

after day, they met face to face, and eat and drank in gloomy silence, weighed down by a restraint which never lessened, and neither choosing to speak again upon the subject uppermost in the mind of both. It was a miserable state of things, and at last Julian decided he would go away rather than endure it; but graceless to the last, he marred a really good cause by showing temper even in the mode of his departure.

For the first time in his life, he put some confidence in Mrs. Murray; at least if it could be called confidence, when he only expressed to her a wish "that Maud should be kept in ignorance of what had occurred."

He said this the evening before he left Bankside, and took, as his opportunity, the few seconds by which he preceded his uncle in leaving the dining-room. Mrs. Murray had carefully avoided all discussion of the subject with him; she rather affected the part of mediator; for the last thing she wished was to be convicted as the author of all this mischief, and for his part, Julian could not conceive that she could carry prejudice and the spirit of opposition to her own sister, so far as to risk the happiness of her inoffensive child.

He was not disposed to be communicative, but

rather avoided discussion when she asked him point blank "what he meant to do?"

"Trust to time, and see what the future will bring forth."

She had promised to do the one thing he asked, so they parted friends; but he went without a word to his uncle of his future plans, prospects, or intentions. It only transpired, *viâ* Paton and Percival, that "the Captain's" private property was packed up as though for a lengthened absence, and Mr. Murray might have rested in the belief that his nephew had only gone to London for a day or two, had he not the same morning chanced to meet Julian's horses leaving the premises in due marching order, and heard that they were to remain at Hounslow till sent for.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

> "The earth has lost her grey sad hue, and blazes
> With her old life-light; hark! yon wind's a song—
> Those clouds are angels' robes—that fiery west
> Is paved with smiling faces—I am a woman,
> And all things bid me love."
>
> *The Saint's Tragedy.*

MAUD soon fell back into the routine of life at Bankside; she had become inured to the precision and formality, which marked every arrangement, and no longer found them so oppressive. The dull, silent breakfast, the stiff, tedious dinner of every-day recurrence, when each dish was discussed verbally, as well as materially, were certainly a penalty; but rather this than the commotion, uncertainty, and disquiet of Lady Louis Crichton's daily movements.

The regular afternoon airing in the carriage was very different from the happy drives she used to take in the basket-phaeton with Julian; but though

Mrs. Murray now always gave her a choice in the matter, Maud duly went, and with alacrity too, though the close carriage, and the invariable routine of going a certain distance, and passing an allotted measure of time, made it rather a toil than a pleasure to all concerned; still she was glad to do something to please, trivial and transitory though the deed might be.

There was not much warmth of affection displayed in the way in which she was treated; but neither were there any longer external evidences of unkindness, or oppression; and Maud had dreams, the thrilling, delightful dreams of youth, on which to fall back, and feed her loving heart. She was not alone in the long mornings she passed the only occupant of the large drawing-room—not desolate in the quick, solitary walks she used to take in the gardens and grounds, when Mrs. Murray, voting it cold and late, would go in-doors after their drive, and leave Maud to pace up and down the gravel walks, in the growing darkness, till the pealing dressing-bell would call her back to the realities of an eating and drinking world. That was the happiest time in the day; the quick motion relieved, at least for a while, the superfluous energy which oppressed her, which, in the

midst of an existence entirely passive, had no resource but to follow on wings, all willing, the flight of hope up and on to an ideal heaven.

The place, too, was haunted for her—without and within, things animate and inanimate, alike brought back the same memories—memories but too dangerously sweet. It was Julian who moved with her wherever she went; those intermediate weeks at Ryde seemed only like a troubled dream; she must have been mad or mistaken, jealous certainly, and very wicked to have felt and behaved as she had done. It was easier to pour blame and contempt upon her own actions, than to let it rest for a moment on the remembrance of one so loved. That last evening, with its words, half love, all tenderness, was identical in spirit with the long summer-days memory reflected back so clearly, when every hour was bright with Eden's sunshine, whose reflex was still so strong as to light up the gloomy autumnal days with splendours not their own, and make a paradise of the dull, prosaic, stately house, where the wheel of time rolled on in its narrow and narrowing cycle, driving heavily, as though loving and being loved were as out of place there as any other emotion.

Maud never looked prettier than on these even-

ings, when she would come down, her cheeks glowing and burning with exercise in the cold air, till the contrast made the fine-grained skin seem clearer and whiter yet; her eyes bright with the inward fever of emotion; the curving lines of the fresh, red lips, ready to part with smiles as happy as her own thoughts, and yet with just enough of her old, quiet, subdued manner left, to temper down excitement into fascination.

Neither Mrs. Murray nor Colonel Kennedy chose to suppose that a heart at ease and hopeful, had anything to do with a change that was so marked, they could not but notice it. The former ascribed it to the visit to Ryde, and Lady Louis Crichton's admirable example; the latter rather shook his head at these suggestions, but opined that "Mademoiselle was not the same girl, who used to be so demure and doubtful."

Had Maud expressed herself as openly, she might have demonstrated that she was hardly so much altered as the gallant Colonel himself. Nothing works so wonderful a reformation, as an entire revolution in a man's position and prospects. Colonel Kennedy was no longer an embarrassed, needy man, who betted and played systematically, and strained every nerve to keep up a position in so-

ciety. His income counted by thousands now, instead of hundreds; and, with a stake in society as a landed proprietor, his opinions and views had undergone no small modification. He had the same swaggering manner, loud voice, and ever-recurring laugh at his own jokes; but, according to himself, he was going to be a model landlord, master, and English country gentleman.

He had left the Guards, but was invited to make Bankside his head-quarters, so long as the business consequent on his succession to his uncle's estates necessitated his being so often in London. Middlemore was a perpetual topic with him, and he took delight even in the petty details of how much flannel, and how many blankets were to be distributed at Christmas, in each of the three parishes, whose manors called him lord; and every morning for a week he came into the drawing-room to ask Maud's assistance in these complicated arrangements, which still appeared to come no nearer to their completion, till at length, in despair, Miss Bingley carried off the steward's papers, and made such a list, as even the hardest head could not but esteem easy of comprehension.

It was the same thing with the new conservatory, and modern furniture for the drawing-room.

Plans, books, patterns, were all supposed to require a feminine opinion, and Colonel Kennedy sedulously took counsel with Maud, till, to her great relief, Mrs. Murray conceived an interest in the chintz and satin question, and, from that moment, made her boudoir the head-quarters of consultation.

She always said she understood Colonel Kennedy "so well," and certainly she appreciated his conversation much more than did Maud; and it was with a very downcast expression of countenance that she listened to Mr. Murray's prognostications that henceforth they "should hardly see so much of Kennedy, he would be getting a wife, and steadying down into a family man."

Mr. Murray, all this time, was anything but easy in his mind. He would break out at the servants in the middle of dinner, in a voice which made Maud tremble, and contradict Mrs. Murray flatly whenever she appealed to him. Otherwise he took very little part in the conversation, but would sit gloomy and silent, listening intently to every word that passed, and watch each speaker in turn. For the first time in her life, Maud began to think Colonel Kennedy's fund of anecdote a benefit; usually he was so delighted with his own stories, that it put an entire stop to anything like

conversation, which is a game to be played by many, not by one; but now he kept up the ball when others did not speak, and she personally was doubtful about uttering a word.

This system of silent observation on Mr. Murray's part arrived at such a pass, that the livelong evening he would sit upright in his chair, rather than fall asleep; and wherever she sat, and whatever she did, Maud fancied his eyes were upon her. He never breathed the smallest word of harshness or rebuke to her; but, for all that, she never felt easy under the piercing glances shot from beneath his shaggy brows, and lost game after game of chess to Colonel Kennedy, for no better reason than because she could not bear to be so watched.

Maud had been at home again nearly a month, when one morning Percival came to dress her in an unusually excited frame of mind. She was not long in unburdening herself.

"Had Miss Bingley heard anything of Captain Murray?"

Maud answered in the negative, but she coloured painfully.

"Well, Mr. Paton had written to a fellow-servant," Percival did not commit herself, by owning to a correspondence with a gentleman's gentleman,

"and he had said he hardly thought the family could know how ill the captain were."

"Ill?" echoed Maud, now as white, as she had before been flushed.

"Not ill to call ill, Miss Bingley," said Percival, in all haste; "but Paton don't consider the captain has ever got rid of the cold he carried with him from Ryde. He did say something of his master's being out in the yacht and getting wet, but that was some time back; now he writes Captain Murray's cough is worse, and says he keeps out and about, and don't take proper care of himself. Paton wishes his master would either come home, or that some one would write from home."

Maud did not answer directly, but, for all that, Percival was not disheartened.

At last her young lady said: "Have you said anything of this to Mrs. Murray?"

Mrs. Percival had not.

"Then pray go down directly, it is almost time for her bell to ring, and let her know," began Maud.

"No, Miss Bingley, it would be no use."

"Why not?" urged the young lady.

Percival hummed and hawed, but it came out at last.

"Things were very unpleasant when the captain was last here, and, begging your pardon, Miss Bingley, but servants will notice such things, it is said that, except just once, no letters have either come from or gone to Captain Murray since."

It was the first time she had heard her own suspicions put into words; but this was not the first time Maud had fancied there was some mystery with respect to Julian. Himself, his health, his doings were all forbidden topics; she had caught the infection, and had learned to be silent on these points; besides which, more than once, when, on entering the room, she had caught his name, so ominous a silence had followed on her appearance, or the subject had been so abruptly changed, that she had every reason to believe Percival was right in her surmises.

Half a word from Maud, and that accomplished waiting-woman would have been out with all her conjectures and conclusions on the subject, and, with the help of the joint opinions of the household, might have enlightened her young lady considerably as to a state of affairs, in which she had no small interest; but Maud, though on very kindly terms with Percival, never, by word or look, encouraged her in the gossipping propensities which

were a part of her vivacious temperament, and to which Julian, in the course of his illness, had given a very considerable stimulus, by drawing her out, and laughing, not so much with, as at her.

"No, Miss Bingley, it is not for me to speak to my mistress, and if I did, it would not be much use either way," was the determined answer.

"Perhaps I had better tell Mrs. Murray," said Maud, doubtfully.

"If I may make so bold as to give an opinion," began the maid.

"Well?" said Maud.

"Well, Miss Bingley, it would be best you should write a line yourself. I've got some things to put up," continued Percival, very glib of speech now she had, in her own vernacular, "out with it"—"things for the captain, and Jem is going down to the station directly; they'll be at Canterbury this evening, and I don't think a warning would be any way too soon."

"No;" Maud could not write, but her denials grew fainter and fainter, as that strong-minded young woman, Mrs. Percival, returned again and again to the charge. She was perfectly respectful, and at last she said:—

"If it were to anybody but Captain Murray,

Miss Bingley, who is as good as a relation, it would be different. I'd never say a word, or wish it; and if I were to mention, Miss Bingley, that I left my last place because I'd have nothing to do with carrying notes, and what they call *billets-doux*, it would not be far from the truth. But who was it nursed the captain? and who has so good a right to speak when he is risking his health, and may be his life?"

Slowly and reluctantly Maud opened her desk. Percival went out of the room, but it was not three minutes before Miss Bingley's bell rang.

The note, for it was no more, ran thus:—

"DEAR JULIAN. Paton reports that your cough is very bad, and I cannot help being afraid you are not taking sufficient care of yourself. Nothing has been said to alarm Mr. or Mrs. Murray, but I think you ought to write; they must be anxious to hear. Pray remember all Mr. White urged on the score of prudence. I have had a letter from Herbert, from Alexandria.

Your's very sincerely,

MAUD BINGLEY.

"P. S. I hope that last day at Ryde was not the beginning of your cold."

Percival held herself altogether above such

treachery, or she might quite well have possessed herself of the contents of the triangular scrap of paper, committed to her charge, for Maud never thought of sealing it. As it was, though she could have wished it was longer, she was too glad to have gained her point to say anything more about it, and in mortal fear lest Miss Bingley might change her mind, she carried it off with her; and the moment her own mistress's toilet was concluded, hastily enclosed it in the parcel, and dispatched the same to Windsor, before Maud had either changed her purpose, or left the breakfast-table.

If Maud had sometimes lately feared she was too happy, there was no such danger now. A cankering evil brooded at her heart, and drained her lately-found security at its source—the evil of suspense. She was so uneasy about Julian; all that Mr. White had said, of the danger of some injury to the lungs by means of the pointed edges of the broken bones, recurred to her mind. He had kept down inflammation then, but he had not scrupled to say that Captain Murray must not run any risks, either of cold, exposure, or violent exercise, till his health was quite re-established.

She only hoped he would write, not to herself,

but, as she had suggested, to his uncle or Mrs. Murray; and every morning she went down early, hoping to see upon the sideboard a letter in Julian's handwriting. Each morning she was disappointed, and more than once she fancied her uncle shared in the feeling, for he would scan every envelope and enclosure over and over; and once he said, almost reproachfully, to Mrs. Murray, who entered at the moment:—

"You see I don't hear from him, as you expected."

One evening, as they were in the midst of dinner, there was a loud peal at the door bell.

"Julian!" was the exclamation which escaped Mr. Murray, and, though he was in the act of helping himself to his favourite cutlets *à la Maintenon*, he paused and listened.

"Beg that the soup may be brought back," said the lady of the mansion, to the servant nearest her.

Maud sat perfectly still, not daring to breathe. She knew what it would be.

There was no bustle, no noise of entering feet, or cheerful voices. The door opened and shut, and the man, who had left the room eagerly enough, came back with more than his usual solemnity.

"A telegraphic message, sir, from Canterbury."

Colonel Kennedy had leant back in his chair, and, as he wiped the gravy from his moustache, he stared hard at the white face opposite him.

"She loves him, by — she loves him," was the inward ejaculation, which made him set his teeth hard and angrily.

Mr. Murray's hand shook so much, he could hardly open the envelope.

"Come directly, your nephew is dangerously ill with inflammation on the lungs."

He read half aloud, half to himself, but the words fell with fearful distinctness on ears, only too well inured to evil tidings.

Colonel Kennedy took the paper; he was not too much bewildered to be able very coolly to announce that it was the surgeon of Julian's regiment who had sent, "which looked bad."

Meanwhile Mr. Murray had gone out into the hall, and was fumbling for his hat and gloves. He evidently did not quite know what he was about, till the butler, who had followed him, said:—

"I have ordered the carriage, sir."

At these words he turned, and went on to his dressing-room, and Mrs. Murray with him. There were none of the loud tones, or angry reproaches,

which a smaller occasion would have called forth; but as Maud stood in the hall, her quick ear caught Mr. Murray's voice, speaking in smothered accents, such as he had used in the hour when Julian was carried in, to all appearance, lifeless; it was not a natural voice, but had a sound in it of some distant turmoil, or threatening storm breaking far away.

There she still stood, very pale and quiet, when the carriage came round; the house door was opened, and Maud in her light evening dress shivered in the chill blast from without, but that was nothing to the cold, dead feeling within. Past, present, future was a blank, yet nothing escaped her. She noticed that Mrs. Murray's eyes were red as if lately visited by tears, and marked that for once, as they came down stairs together, she was almost affectionate in her manner to her husband.

Mr. Murray did not generally trouble himself to say good-by, and Maud stood back to let him pass undisturbed. He saw her, though, and stretched out his hand. Insensibly he drew her towards him, insensibly, too, with cold, tremulous lips, he kissed her cheek. It was the first token of affection Maud had ever received within the walls of that

house, and, as if with a sudden consciousness that he knew what she felt, she lifted her grave eyes to the stern face working with repressed emotion, and conflicting feelings.

That earnest, mournful look Mr. Murray could not bear; he averted his head hurriedly, hastened out of the house, and left it to Colonel Kennedy to perceive that the young lady's long eyelashes were wet with tears.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

"Who knows what may happen? * * * * Patience and shuffle the cards! * * * * Perhaps after all I may some day go to Rome."—LONGFELLOW.

IF that night Mrs. Murray could have thereby secured Julian's recovery, she would willingly have given her consent to his marrying Maud; but the next day, after she had seen Mr. White, she quite changed her mind, and settled it was a false alarm.

Mr. White did not think "dangerously," meant "dying." He said doubtless Captain Murray was in a very critical state, but there was more cause to fear for the future than for the present. Certainly he would not answer for the consequences, if he spent the winter in England, but people had recovered from affections of the lungs before now; Captain Murray's constitution was in his favour; but, for all that, he went off to Canterbury himself,

the moment he had seen the worst patients on his daily list.

Mr. White was so strong in his belief that leaving England was the only chance of Julian's ultimate restoration to health, that it did not come like a blow on Maud, when a week after she heard it was decided he should set off for Italy the first day he could leave his room. The sickening sense of a greater evil had pressed on her day by day, till she was thankful to accept, what was by comparison, a minor trial. All that there is in that strange mystery called "woman's love," had risen like a wave within her,—as the wailing sound of the coming storm swept by—gathering into itself the whole force and fervour of her nature—the heavy clouds parted for a while; it was not on the cold shore of death, the deep waters of affection were to break, nor had the ebb—when they flow so helplessly back—yet come.

Still, those slow, tedious, lingering days of alternating hopes and fears were almost insupportable, but, in the martyrdom of her womanhood, Maud could neither fight nor fly; she had no choice but to sit down, and passively accept her destiny as others have done, and possibly will have to do till time shall be no more, and perchance

like them, too, waste the pleasant season of youth, or a whole existence in a forced repose.

Mrs. Murray talked of her anxiety to every one she saw, told her visitors how often she longed to be at Canterbury, and more, for a whole twenty-four hours, was full of a scheme for accompanying Julian, as far on his way south, as Paris. The main object of this plan was to refresh her wardrobe at the fountain-head of fashion; but interwoven with this idea was so much besides that was tangible, feasible, and pleasant, that for a whole day and night Maud was in a state of excitement and almost of exhilaration.

Colonel Kennedy came from town, and bit by bit demolished the castle so prosperously reared in his absence. It was the worst possible time of the year for crossing the Channel; November was a wretched month in Paris, not at all the time for a first visit; far better wait till spring, when they might make up a pleasant party, and meet Julian, who then would be in health to enjoy the thing; and he urged Mrs. Murray instead to come down to Middlemore at Christmas, and do the honours for him to a large party, it was his purpose to invite when his establishment should be complete.

The balance was about even in favour of Paris

and Middlemore, when, unannounced and quite unexpectedly, Mr. Murray returned, and put all these pleasant plans to flight. Maud did not know how much she had built on this one chance of seeing Julian again, till she heard that he was actually gone. She was bitterly disappointed, and it went to her heart to hear how weak and ill he still was when he started, for like a great many people, Mr. Murray took a sort of pleasure in dwelling on the dark side of the picture.

For the first week he had hardly been allowed to see his nephew, and for the last much talking, or anything like excitement, had been strictly prohibited, on which fact he laid great stress; but for all that, Mr. Murray had come home on excellent terms with both himself and Julian; and Maud concluded that the breach, whatever it might have been, was quite healed; she might wonder and rack her brain with conjectures, but after all she was quite in the dark, and even Mrs. Murray, albeit she was privileged to ask questions, was not much better informed.

Mr. Murray did not give a very clear account of himself. The truth was, the reconciliation between Julian and himself had been more tacit than explicit; not a word or so much as an allusion had

been hazarded in the sick room as to the unwitting cause of their dissension, thought it must be confessed, that when his nephew was at the worst, the old man had entertained some wild ideas of sending for Maud, procuring a special licence, and thrusting upon Julian, as he had done many a time, when he was a child, the very boon which, so short a time before, he had most unreasonably denied him.

If he had heard half his nephew's sighs over the rough handling of his hospital nurse, Mr. Murray must infallibly have relented. Paton shook his head ruefully more than once; and when, in the most critical juncture, blisters were to be dressed and leeches applied, never failed to say, "Miss Bingley would have known how to manage, sir;" but it was too sore a subject for Julian to touch on, and while his uncle "waited for an opening," he sedulously avoided anything which might tend to a renewal of the discussion.

Julian was very ill, and still more out of spirits about his health. He made the best of himself whenever he saw his uncle; but though quite sensible what an unwonted effort this visit to Canterbury was, Mr. Murray's society did little to cheer him.

That gentleman had taken up his quarters at the Fountain Hotel, where, though he had the best rooms, and, as Mr. Paton expressed it, "the best of everything," his time hung very heavy on his hands. A morning and afternoon visit to the Barracks was his sole occupation, but when he got there, he had not much to say.

"Mrs. Wright had ordered him an excellent dinner," or else "the fine old port" of the same hostelrie had disagreed with him. It was of facts, such as these, not opinions, far less feelings, that Mr. Murray spoke to his nephew; and no one, who saw the stiff frigidity of these meetings, would have believed how much real affection subsisted between these near relations.

Mr. Murray could not be easy until he had rescinded the protest, he had unwillingly enough entered, against Julian's choice of a wife; but it was not till he was standing on the deck of the steamer, which was to convey his nephew the first twenty miles of his journey, that he brought himself to say:—

"I almost wish we had made up our minds to accompany you, Julian. Your aunt would have liked the change, and you will hardly find so good a nurse anywhere as Maud."

Julian's pale face flushed instantly. It was the first time her name had been mentioned between them.

"I could not expect her, sir, to take the same trouble again, at least under the circumstances."

"After all, I don't know that you could do better than marry her," said Mr. Murray. "She is not a girl of extravagant habits, and women who have money are very apt to spend it."

A more matter-of-fact, unromantic way of advocating a young lady's cause could not well have been devised. Mr. Murray was hustled off the steamer before he had time for another word, and left standing on the old pier at Dover, but he felt quite satisfied with his morning's work; and when, at the end of the week, he got a letter from Julian, written from Paris, with a little note enclosed for Maud, he quite made up his mind it contained the offer of his nephew's hand and heart.

Luckily, Mrs. Murray was late that morning for breakfast, and as Maud stood by the fire reading her letter, the old man's fertile brain was busy with calculations.

"December, January, February. They might start in a week at latest; it was a good open winter for travelling—and be at Rome by Christ-

mas. There was nothing to wait for, better before Lent than after; it would be driving it off too late in the spring else. Mr. and Mrs. Julian Murray might take a little tour, and then they would all travel home together."

Mr. Murray might have spared himself the trouble of going into the library to fetch the map of Europe; there was no need of going over again the question of which was the best route; whether across the Alps, and down into Italy, or to follow on Julian's track through France to Marseilles, and by an Italian coasting-steamer on to the Eternal City.

There was a flush on Maud's cheek, and a happy smile on her lip, as she stood, silent and meditative, with the thin sheet of foreign post paper open in her hand. Mr. Murray looked at her so keenly and inquiringly, that at last she held it out towards him.

He had a little scruple about taking it, but curiosity, as to "how Julian had put it," carried the day.

He was much more disappointed than she was, inasmuch as he had expected more. After all, Julian had only written to ask Maud to look upon the pony and pony-carriage as her own till he

came back to reclaim them. It was not a love letter; there was not a single word of passion in all the four closely-written sides of the sheet; but it was such a letter as a man could only write to one who possessed all but an acknowledged claim upon his heart—more, it was such a letter as a man could only write to a woman, whom he knew, felt the tenderest interest in all he said, and thought, and did.

"You must write, and thank Julian," was Mr. Murray's comment, when he had spelt it through. "I shall answer his to-morrow; let me have your letter to enclose."

Mrs. Murray came down, and though Mr. Murray read his own portion of the foreign correspondence aloud, he left no opening for Maud to produce her share of the same. When another letter came through the same channel, a similar farce was gone through. Maud had her letters, Mr. Murray read them. Her proprietorship in the pony was much of the same character; when Mr. Murray visited the stable, he always called her, and Donald was duly fed with bread and apples, but there was no more overt act of possession.

Maud and Mr. Murray were silently agreed on more points than one. She was always summoned

to his study to look out in the map the places Julian dated from. His "eyes were not good enough." She liked to read all the works upon Italy to be found in Mudie's Catalogue, and had orders to mark down the passages which referred to subjects alluded to in Julian's letters.

"I never heard of art, when I was young, but Julian has had every advantage," was Mr. Murray's confidential remark, on one of these occasions; but he never talked of his nephew when Mrs. Murray was in the room, and testily told her "it did not signify," when one day she rather triumphantly read out of the "Globe" an announcement of "Lady Louis Crichton's arrival in Rome."

## CHAPTER XXIX.

**"While yet upon life's sands the foot-print lies,**
**In shallow mould of good news and surprise."**

TIME went on, and no events marked its course. Nothing could be more satisfactory than the accounts of Julian's health, and there really seemed no further cause for anxiety about him. He had never been kept a day in the house, nor known an hour's discomfort, since he had breathed the genial air of Italy. His letters spoke of balls and dinner-parties, of hunting on the Campagna, and all the gaieties of modern Rome; Lady Louis Crichton's name was scarcely mentioned, but then he did not write so lengthily or so fully as at first; the distance from home was no longer a novelty, and gradually he ceased to lament having been obliged to leave England, and came to dwell with pleasure on the varieties of continental life, to

which, on his first introduction, he had found it hard to reconcile himself.

Stirring action, ambitions, rivalries, turmoils, and excitement, either in public life, or in the more private arena of society, are the prerogatives of the stronger sex. Whether they are the happier or the better for its unshackled exercise, is a question which, in the prime of manhood, they scarce stay to ask; and Julian was running the same race as others, following in the track custom and convention have marked out.

It was for Maud to stay quietly at home, with nothing to look to, save the uncertain and far-distant period of his return, who was all the world to her; everything was dim and vague beyond that hope.

She scarcely ventured to believe Julian loved her; but, for all that, there was a conscious expectancy, a remembrance of most tender words,—if not of love, of something very near akin,—which still kept up their low, soft echo in her heart; the look, the tone with which they had been uttered, lived once more within her, and recalled again and again, and again still sent the same impassioned thrill through her frame.

Julian's name never voluntarily passed her lips

now, nor could Maud hear it mentioned, even in the common course of conversation, or by the most casual acquaintance, without a sudden tremor, and, stranger still, a pang, as though some sharp weapon had pierced veritably through her heart.

If her life was not a very pleasant one, Maud was content; she had hope; and if that did not, according to her reading of the word, bring her very near to happiness, at least it was strong enough to carry her through the dull, grey days of that long, long winter, which, if objectless and monotonous as they passed, were yet associated with what she valued above all else on earth.

It was Mrs. Murray who grumbled over the cold, frost, and snow, which marked the dawning of a year destined to be memorable, not only to the homeless heart of a young, fair, and loving woman, but in the world's annals. The white wings of peace waved over many an English fireside that Christmas, where, if the talk turned perchance on war, it was but as a visionary thing, made up of martial deeds and high exploits, waving banners and victorious shouts. Who recked then of the dark shades of domestic sorrow, so soon to form the reverse of the picture, or divined that the signal was given, the angel of battle had girded

himself with strength, while the blast of his breath bore death. Ere the cycle of that little year was run, there was mourning instead of mirth in many a home, and from many a heart a cry went up to Heaven for their best and bravest, lavishing blood, life, and health on the bleak, thankless shore of a foreign land.

If Mr. Murray, who perpetually "staked his reputation" on the amenity of Russia, had looked with far-seeing eye into the future, he could not have set himself more stedfastly against Christmas festivities, or New Year rejoicings. In vain Mrs. Murray murmured; Mr. Murray made the weather an excuse for declining all invitations, and would not even listen to her plans for going to Middlemore, when a formal proposal for a visit was pressed on him by Colonel Kennedy. He went so far as actually to forbid his wife to avail herself of it either, which she was quite ready to do, on the pretext of its being a little gaiety for Maud.

Mr. Murray was quite shrewd enough to know that it was her own pleasure his wife sought; and he, for once, did not choose to be managed with respect to a project, of whose end and aim he had his own ideas.

Mrs. Murray had exercised her influence with

fatal effect in separating Julian from Maud, but she had no idea how bitterly her husband resented her share in the transaction. He had been seduced into a line of conduct, which, however much in consonance with his prejudices, was at variance with his principles; and whenever the probability of an European war was hinted at, Mr. Murray—who had always discouraged Julian's love for the profession of arms—remembered with acerbity that, had it not been for his wife's persuasions reacting through himself, his nephew would probably by this time have sold out of the army, have settled down at Fintore, and been restrained by the ties of a loving marriage from regretting, as Colonel Kennedy perpetually did, that he had "lost his chance of seeing service."

Mrs. Murray was discontented, but still self-satisfied, and found consolation for the unusual restraint put upon her actions, in the fact that Colonel Kennedy did not take offence, or at all curtail his visits to Bankside in consequence. He came oftener than ever after Christmas, always went away with seeming regret, and on more than one occasion gave up a day's hunting—no small sacrifice to such a man—for the sake of staying another four-and-twenty hours.

One cold, wet evening, however, towards the end of January, when he was expected to arrive in time for dinner, Colonel Kennedy did not make his appearance.

Mrs. Murray had sent secret orders to the cook, whereby the ringing of the dressing-bell was retarded, and dinner was consequently late. Mr. Murray smothered his anger for a while, but throughout the meal everything was wrong with him; and when the dessert was placed upon the table, and the servants gone, his smouldering anger found vent on the recusant and absent guest.

Mrs. Murray took up Colonel Kennedy's defence; her husband grew more violent, she retorted, he recriminated, and, in the extremity of his passion, the real cause of Mr. Murray's perpetual ill-humour escaped him.

It was not till Maud hurriedly got up and left the room, that either of the belligerents remembered what had been said.

It was not much; the barren fact that the question of her marriage with Julian had been mooted, that Mrs. Murray disapproved, and Mr. Murray testily disclaimed further raising of objections, was all Maud stayed to hear. At the first mention of Julian's name, in connection with her-

self, she fled the room, and now she stood by the drawing-room fire, agitated, but not unhappy.

She heard Colonel Kennedy arrive, and, rather to her surprise, after a word to the servants, he came up the half-dozen stairs leading to the drawing-room, two steps at a time, and approached her.

"Good news! Miss Bingley, good news! You will hardly guess, but what should you be most glad to hear?"

Her thoughts flew to Julian, perhaps he was on his way home. The next moment something in Colonel Kennedy's face made her blush for her own folly, though it had found no utterance.

"The name caught my eye directly," he continued. "The evening papers just came in as I was leaving my Club, and that kept me. See here," and Colonel Kennedy produced a newspaper from the pocket of his thick over-coat, and pointed to the close, small characters of the Gazette.

"Arthur Bingley to be Captain, *vice* Godfrey De Haviland, retired," he read.

Maud's joy was almost too great for her thanks to be very coherent, and Colonel Kennedy was as delighted with himself, as if it had been all his own doing.

"Will it bring him home?" repeated he, in

answer to her quick questions. "I knew that would be the first thing you would ask, so I went round by the War Office, got hold of a man I knew, promised him a day's hunting if he'd come to Middlemore, and made him find out all about it. Arthur will be in England by the end of February, at latest."

Colonel Kennedy was familiar with all the world, both behind their backs and before their face. Maud took no exception at his manner to-day.

"I congratulate you," he said, holding out his hand; "and none the less that he will be one of the first to be sent to the East. The battalion your brother comes home to join is under orders for foreign service."

Maud's exclamation of dismay went for nothing; Colonel Kennedy was in full swing.

"Hunting won't be over," he went on; "I'll ask a party to meet you, and your brother shall bring you down to Middlemore, without giving old Murray a choice in the matter. I can mount Arthur every day in the week, if he likes."

Colonel Kennedy's congratulatory handshaking was rather a rough process, but Maud bore it, and was so much obliged to him, and said it so pleasantly, that he continued to make fresh calls upon

her for gratitude, and had not concluded his self-glorification at his own forethought in going to the War Office and "making it all out," as he phrased it, when Mrs. Murray came into the room, and the gallant colonel had the pleasure of telling his story all over again, and of exciting some interest, if not in her mind, at least in that of Mr. Murray, who, for the remainder of the evening, divided his attention between the Gazette and the Army List, the latter being very favourite reading with him.

## CHAPTER XXX.

> "Was ever such a brother?
> Turn over all the stories of the world,
> And search through all the memories of mankind,
> And find me such a friend."
>
> BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER.

BETWEEN the time of this announcement of his return, and that when Arthur should really arrive, Maud had ample leisure to perplex herself with conjectures, as to the meaning of the unguarded words, touching Julian and herself, which Mr. Murray had let fall in her presence.

Not another syllable did she hear on the subject; there was nothing to be gleaned from her aunt's manner, and Mr. Murray himself from henceforth, seemed to feel an unusual constraint in speaking about Julian.

His letters to his uncle were always handed round the breakfast-table, and one or two which came just about this time, were full of nothing but

the prospect of war, and of directions for what was to be done should an army of occupation be sent to the East. Mr. Murray debated and demurred, and raised every possible objection; but Julian never seemed to doubt for a moment that he was quite in health to rejoin his regiment.

Maud's enclosures generally treated more of impressions and feelings than of barren facts; but it was weeks now since she had received a single line from him, and if it had not been for Mr. Murray's increased kindness towards her, there would have been times when despair must have gained the mastery over hope and suspense alike. There was no mistaking his manner; had she been, indeed, affianced to his nephew, he could hardly have lavished more forethought and consideration upon her.

With all this, the time seemed very long till she heard from Arthur; but at last a letter came. He was to sail by the next mail steamer, and as this announcement of his arrival could only precede him by a few days, and as he feared his stay in England would be very short, he begged Maud, with Bridget's aid, to secure lodgings in London, and to be there on a certain day to meet him, that they might be together as much as possible.

Strange to say, Mrs. Murray raised no objection. "Rather you than me, Maud," she said carelessly, when, with breathless eagerness, her niece broached the subject at breakfast.

"I suppose your brother knows what he is about; but London lodgings are miserable things at best; you must take care and not be cheated."

"There's no time to be lost, it seems," said Mr. Murray; "I can take you to town with me, Maud, to-day, to make arrangements. I shall see she takes comfortable apartments, Mrs. Murray."

That lady was too wise to dispute this decision; and before noon Maud found herself tucked under Mr. Murray's arm in a crowded thoroughfare, who knowing to a yard how far he might drive for a shilling, was vigorously disputing Cabby's demand for an extra sixpence. He gained his victory, and in high good humour, walked her across the park into Belgravia; and they saw so many "Apartments to let" by the way, that Maud despaired of ever reaching Bridget's abode in Ebury-street.

She had to speak out bravely, and openly say they were beyond her brother's means, or Mr. Murray would have closed with some very taking rooms in one of the streets leading from Grosvenor Place; but by this time Maud had found out nothing

her uncle liked better than to be told little details, and that facts and plans were never too trifling or petty to interest him; and an account of how well Bridget had managed for them latterly at Torquay, carried them straight on to the door of the neat little house, of which she and her niece only occupied the lower part.

Bridget's surprise at seeing her young lady was tempered with respect at the august presence of her whilome master.

"Oh, ah! Bridget! I remember your face," was Mr. Murray's preface to the business on which he entered forthwith.

The drawing-rooms, happily, were vacant, with the two bedrooms above. They were very small, but clean and neatly furnished; and Maud seemed to find so many charms where Mr. Murray pished and pshawed, and looked so smilingly and complacently to Bridget, that he sat down to consider.

"Perhaps you are right; these rooms are more suitable, but it will be no expense to your brother; I am going to settle with this good woman;" and accordingly Mr. Murray, drawing a chair to the writing-table, and pen in hand, entered upon details of coals and costs, into which he would not have been permitted to inquire in his own house.

Small economies were his delight; for all his handsome income, the early habit of saving was strong upon him still, and, though generous, he was never personally extravagant. It was his wife who loved profusion, and thought it added to her dignity and consequence to live with ostentatious splendour. In the same spirit she ambitioned to be fashionable, and lacking high position, noble birth, and great connections, must needs fall back upon the aristocracy of mere wealth, forgetting her husband really possessed that which required no pretension to support, namely, that aristocracy of character, which has been justly said, belongs more especially to our middle classes, and makes at once the glory and the strength of England.

Maud did not understand till her uncle had gone off to the City, and left her under Bridget's care, with strict directions when and where to meet him at an appointed hour, that his object in obtaining an estimate of their probable expenses per week, was that he might strictly defray the same.

"You need say nothing about it," was his answer, when, seated next his best ear in the railway carriage, Maud, half frightened at her own temerity, began to deprecate his kind intentions.

"You need say nothing about it; when your

poor mother died, I made up my mind to provide you with a home, and when I say a thing I do it. Five guineas a-week! it is not much for board, lodging, and attendance—three weeks? you say your brother talks of. Well, we will call it a month; that's twenty pounds, and I shall give you ten more, Maud, in case Mrs. Bridget does not supply your table as liberally as you wish, or you should require any ready cash. I'll give you the money Monday morning before you start; take care you don't lose it, that's all."

Maud acknowledged his kindness almost with tears. It was not Mr. Murray's liberality, but his kind consideration which went to her heart; and he, on his part, had penetration enough to discover how very gratefully she received any little interest he testified in her brother's behalf.

"I got Arthur his appointment," he resumed; "your poor mother would never have made up her mind to send him to Carshalton, if it had not been for me."

"The Artillery is certainly the best branch of the service," said Maud, who would have said as much for the Marines if her brother had chanced to be enrolled among them, "and Arthur is so proud of his profession."

"Yes, yes, that's the way with young men.

We shall see how they like active service. They've had an easy time of it of late years; we shall never have such a war as that in the Peninsular again."

"I hope not," was the fervent answer.

Mr. Murray sat meditating for awhile. At last he said:—

"I'm glad I thought about making that little arrangement with Bridget. Arthur will have enough to do with his money. I should hardly like to say how much all Julian's paraphernalia for the campaign will come to."

Maud acquiesced if she sighed.

"I shall come and see your brother, one day," resumed Mr. Murray; "and mind if he can get any extension of leave, you may bring him to Bankside for as long as you like, Maud. Better not stay too long in London, it is an expensive place."

Except to the cabman, Maud had not heard Mr. Murray's voice raised in anger all through the day; "but the Ethiopian cannot change his skin," and the coachman was loudly reprimanded because the horses were not standing in their cloths when the train came up; and Mrs. Murray furthermore gave great offence by not knowing in what quarter of the town Ebury-street was to be found.

Percival did not "think much" of the locality; but Maud was in a flutter of pleasurable excitement, when, a few days later, she found herself in possession of her temporary home; and when she had arranged the flowers she brought with her from Bankside, and settled the furniture a little less formally, she could do nothing but sit and expect Arthur, and fly to the window every time a cab went by.

The West Indian mail was due that very day, as Mr. Murray had carefully ascertained in the City; and Maud sat up that night till long after the last train from Southampton ought to have arrived, and did not give her brother up till it was vain to hope any more, or to ascribe the delay to the unpunctuality of engine-drivers, or the circumlocution of cabs.

The next morning it was the same thing over again; while Bridget was bringing in the urn, and bustling about with breakfast, Maud, sated with Bradshaw, was eagerly searching through the Times. Mr. Murray gathered a good deal of information from "naval and military intelligence," why should not she?

"The West Indian mail is expected, that is all, Bridget," said she, as the door opened behind her.

"And its arrival will be in the second edition," was the answer; but it was not Bridget's voice, nor Bridget's hands which were placed upon her shoulders.

"Arthur! Arthur!" In the excess of her joy it was all she could articulate, and, for a time, the expression of his gladness was almost as voiceless.

He had eyes and ears for no one but his sister, till Bridget, who had disappeared to wipe her spectacles, re-entered, and made it her business to recal them to the affairs of common life, by putting in a plea for the buttered muffins and broiled bacon she had so carefully prepared; but, even then, Arthur was not content till he had drawn her into the full light of the window.

"You are altered, Maud; but I think it is for the better," said he, scanning her anxiously.

"I certainly am not the poor, sick, miserable creature you left last year," was the smiling answer.

"Are you quite well, Maud?" persisted he.

"I have even forgotten that I ever was ill," said she, cheerfully.

He looked at her scrutinizingly. His sister's happiness, his sister's well-being were evidently the subjects uppermost in Arthur's mind; for when seated at the table, Maud said, "Dear old Bridget!

see, she has everything just the same as we used to have at home; we never have such rolls as these at Bankside;" his answer was:—

"So you have not taken root yet, Maud?" and he spoke inquiringly.

"I think I have grown into my place, at last," she said. "Torquay is home and always will be, but I begin to feel Bankside to be next best."

He looked pleased, and she went on.

"It is to people more than places, one becomes attached, and if there were nobody else, uncle Murray cares for me—" she broke off abruptly.

"Where is Julian?" asked Arthur, after awhile.

"He stays through March in Italy, and joins his regiment either *en route*, or when they reach their destination. Uncle Murray has some interest, and arranged that it should be so; there was some difficulty, for Julian received orders to sail with his men."

"It was November, I think, when he left home," remarked Arthur.

"Yes, three months ago!" She spoke very quietly; she neither sighed nor blushed, though her brother was watching her intently.

"And Mrs. Murray?" was Arthur's next inquiry.

"If you did not look at her, and see the change, you would say, she is just the same aunt Sophia she was eleven years ago; manner, voice and all."

"And should I find the same little girl, who was always running away out of the drawing-room to Bridget?"

Maud smiled gravely.

"For the first three months I should have been very glad of that harbour of refuge—the nursery. But it is different now."

"Whence came the change?"

"With Julian's illness; at least it began then. When he is at home, everything goes smoothly."

"Do you miss him much?"

"Everybody must."

If Arthur had any suspicions of the state of Maud's heart, he did not attempt to force her confidence. He noticed, indeed, that while speaking openly and unreservedly of her feelings with respect to everybody else, his sister never once expressed any opinion as to Julian. He had occupied a conspicuous place in many of her letters; she still liked to talk of his accident, and never wearied of the subject of his illness; but between that time and this there seemed a great gulf. Her opinions on many subjects, no doubt, were his,

but she was never the first to refer to him; and when Mr. Murray came one morning bringing a letter from his nephew with him, Arthur thought his uncle was quite as embarrassed in asking her to read it, as his sister was in receiving it from him.

He hardly knew what to think, particularly when about this time, and not many days after his arrival, in the course of a walk in Hyde Park, the subject of Herbert's abrupt departure came under discussion.

"What did the Murrays say to Lady Louis Crichton's conduct, for she in a sort of way belongs to them? My uncle must have been rather puzzled how to act, as he manages all the fair lady's money affairs; for though Herbert is good-looking enough to justify love at first sight, he was hardly the match it would be expected she should make."

"I don't think aunt Sophia or Mr. Murray ever had a suspicion on the subject; they were too much engrossed by Julian's accident, the only time they ever saw Herbert and Ada Crichton together, to take in anything else."

"What!" ejaculated Arthur, "not know it? I thought you said Julian was at Ryde."

"Oh! yes, he was there for nearly a month," said Maud.

"Surely he was not so blind, as not to perceive what was passing before his eyes."

"He found out that Herbert admired Lady Louis Crichton very much, only seeing them together the very evening before the accident," said Maud; "but they wanted their engagement kept a secret, and I never mentioned it."

"I don't understand nobody's suspecting it, particularly Julian, for, as far as I remember, he was at Ryde at the very time of the quarrel," remarked Arthur.

"Lady Louis took infinite pains to conceal the fact," returned Maud, "and after we left London nobody could have divined from her manner, that Herbert was more to her than an ordinary acquaintance. I often thought if their engagement had been known to any one member of the family beyond Edgeworth and myself, she would never have ventured to trifle with him as she did," and Maud ended with a sigh.

"As the affair has turned out," said Arthur, "it is better for him as it is. It does not do for a man to owe everything to his wife, particularly to such a woman as I suppose Lady Louis Crichton to

be: and Herbert must have given up his profession."

"Like Bridget, you are of opinion 'money mates with money,'" suggested Maud, with a futile attempt at a smile.

"I think a woman may safely take all from her husband, always premising that in return she gives him her whole heart, uninfluenced by his worldly position, be it what it may."

Maud was silent. At last Arthur said:—

"I have once or twice fancied Mr. and Mrs. Murray would have liked Julian to marry Lady Louis Crichton."

"I never heard anything said on the subject by them," was her reply; but Arthur fancied his sister kept her face slightly averted, as she spoke.

"I don't know what made me think it, but I always had an idea that there was some reason for Lady Louis Crichton's so sedulously enjoining secresy, after she had given Herbert her promise," persisted Arthur, feeling himself cruel even while he spoke; but that there was a mystery, he felt sure, whether Maud were conscious of it or not.

"I think not," and Maud shook her head, and spoke in the absent tone of one reviewing past acts and events by a new light.

"He will be a rash man, whoever he may be, who marries a woman, who has acted the part she has, even supposing Herbert to be her only victim," remarked Arthur, finding his companion not likely to speak.

"Lady Louis is very fascinating, and many people think her very pretty," said Maud, in a constrained voice.

"Where is she now?"

"In Rome."

Arthur bit his lip. "What took her there, I wonder?"

"Her own errant fancy, I should suppose," said Maud, "though she often talks of being ill, she never is so."

"Have you ever heard from her since your visit?"

"Never; I wrote once, after I got back to Bankside, but I never had an answer. She did not even write to tell Mrs. Murray she was leaving England, which was a matter of some surprise to us all."

The brother and sister, who had followed the pathway by the Serpentine, were now skirting the open space between the road and the entrance to

Kensington Gardens, when some gentlemen on horseback came dashing through the posts.

"What a splendid quadruped! How well the fellow sits him!" ejaculated Arthur, as one horse reared up on end, when slightly checked. "Who is it, Maud? See, he is bowing to you."

True enough; it was Colonel Kennedy, who, lifting his hat high in the air, bent almost to his saddle-bow.

"Colonel Kennedy is it!" cried Arthur; "he is better looking than I fancied he could be, Maud, from your description of the man."

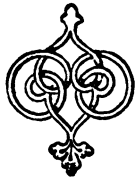
"Some people think him handsome," replied Maud, in a tone which implied she did not.

"He is looking back to see which way we go," remarked her brother, as they in their turn came upon the bridge. "I thought you were rather enemies; I did not expect to see him greet you with such a smiling countenance," continued he.

"We are better friends than we used to be," returned Maud; "Colonel Kennedy has not been nearly so disagreeable since he came into his uncle's money. He is a rich man now."

"Maud, Maud, I never expected to hear you measure any man by the standard of his worldly goods."

"You see what comes of deserting me," said Maud, laughing, "'Live and learn;' I don't despair of coming to take an interest in the money market, and I fairly own to always looking in the paper to see the state of trade, and how they get on in the manufacturing districts."



## CHAPTER XXXI.

"'Twas a sunny day, and the morning psalm
We sang in the church together;
We felt in our hearts the joy and calm
Of the calm and joyous weather.

"The slow, and sweet, and sacred strain,
Through every bosom stealing,
Check'd every thought that was light and vain,
And waked each holy feeling."

EMMELINE HINXMAN.

WHEN they reached home, Colonel Kennedy's card lay on the drawing-room table. He had scribbled a few lines in pencil, to be given to Miss ingley.

"If you will allow me, I shall call before twelve to-morrow, in hopes of seeing you and your brother."

"I wonder what brings him to town," said Maud, carelessly, as she walked towards the fire-

place, and untied her bonnet. "He went down to Middlemore with the intention of staying, and said his hunting and other engagements would not allow of his coming to Bankside all through the month."

"He is an idle man, I suppose, and likes change," remarked Arthur, and there the subject dropped.

Next morning, however, he did not go out on business, as usual, directly after breakfast. Arthur's days were well filled; there were military forms to go through, official arrangements to be concluded, besides making his own preparations for a campaign, which it was now sure would end in active service.

Busy as he necessarily was, he always so managed as to get back for a pleasant walk with Maud in the best part of the afternoon; for his one recreation, his great happiness, was to be with his sister; while she, on her part, jealously watched each day as it passed.

Arthur had only two weeks more before he joined; but though he might possibly be at Woolwich for some time before embarking, and wished Maud to stay in London, in the hope that he might be with her every day, the time seemed lamentably short for all the happiness crowded into it.

Before twelve, a very gaudy cab, drawn by the best stepper money could buy, brought Colonel Kennedy to the door.

"The colonel knows a good horse when he sees it," was Arthur's uttered comment, as he stood at the window, while Colonel Kennedy noisily tramped up the stairs. In uniform or not, he always walked as if he wore a sabre, and innumerable other trappings.

"A man of the world, but bad style; a man of position, though hardly a gentleman," was the judgment which did not pass Arthur's lips, as their visitor first swaggered up to Maud, and, turning, begged her to introduce him to her brother.

His sister's graceful ease, and quiet composure, with a certain formal courtesy of manner, which their guest's overwhelming civilities could not ruffle, was that which struck Arthur as the change in Maud—a change he could not but admire; for if his sister had gained this by intercourse with the world, she had not lost the simple, guileless, loving heart, the blest prerogative of those, who, from youth to age, live "unspotted by the world."

"What day will you come to Middlemore? Have you talked it over with your brother? Give me only twenty-four hours' notice, and everything

shall be prepared, distinguished visitors and all," said Colonel Kennedy, in the same breath with his salutations.

Miss Bingley, with rather measured civility, explained how short her brother's stay was.

"We only go down to Bankside for one day, and come back the same evening," she added; "Arthur can ill afford the time even for so short a journey."

Colonel Kennedy was not disposed to give up the prospect of seeing them in his own house, and, turning to Arthur, said:—

"The hounds meet within distance of Middlemore, either by rail or otherwise, five days a-week; there will be no difficulty about a mount; come down just as you are, and I'll find horses for you."

It was now Captain Bingley's—no longer a distinction only belonging to Herbert—turn to decline with due formality; but with his usual pertinacity of purpose, it was with difficulty Colonel Kennedy could be induced to resign the idea.

"Well, we will hope it is only a pleasure deferred; but I am sorry, for we could have gone down to-morrow, by the afternoon express."

"I thought, Colonel Kennedy," said Maud, "you

were settled at Middlemore, for a month at least; I remember you said so."

"Oh! ah! yes, yes, I did mean it. I came up only to see my old comrades off for the Crimea. Miss Bingley, you should have come to the station yesterday morning, to see the last of the old regiments; it was quite a spectacle. You have often heard our band; we wanted it Thursday morning to drown the cries of the women and children—great bearded men, too, with tears running down their cheeks! I did not like it myself."

Maud's lip quivered, and Arthur, who knew what was impending in the future, interposed.

"Colonel Kennedy, do you know of such a thing as a good, serviceable horse? I have to buy a couple to take out with me."

The bait took directly.

"Did you notice the mare I was on yesterday? She would make a capital charger."

"She is beyond my mark, I am afraid," said Arthur.

"Blemished, but sound; she was turned out last winter, got on the ice, broke through and cut her leg; no harm done, but the scar don't look very pretty; let you have her cheap; what do you say?"

"I should like to see her," said Arthur, in his

calm, gentlemanlike manner, such a contrast, as Maud thought, to the swaggering, confident pseudo-guardsman; "but I want a strong, stout nag, and I am half afraid I shall find her too good for my work."

"Never mind; I'll drive you up to where my horses stand. There is no harm in seeing the mare, and having her out to try; and we can look in at Tattersall's on the way."

With that, Arthur went in search of his hat and gloves, and Colonel Kennedy rose to depart, but not till he had heard her brother tell Maud, she might certainly expect him back to walk by three o'clock at latest.

"Miss Bingley," began their visitor, in rather a lower tone, and with a little of the embarrassment which was usually foreign to his manner, "I keep my brougham in town, it's convenient. Man and horse are doing nothing, literally nothing just now, but eat off their heads; let me send it down for your use."

"You are very good," said Maud, and she spoke without looking towards her brother, or a minute's hesitation; "but I do not care to drive; I get tired of the carriage even at Bankside; these walks are quite a treat."

"Very good, very good. Only if you are going

anywhere at night, let me know, and you shall have it; besides, when your brother is at Woolwich it may be different."

"A good-natured fellow enough," said Arthur, when next he saw his sister. "It's a pity his manner should be so much against him."

"I wondered what you, who thought him so good-looking yesterday," said Maud, demurely, "would say when you heard his voice, and saw him laugh, and show his teeth."

"Maud, Maud, you are too bad! If you behave in this way now, how did you treat Colonel Kennedy, when a foe?"

His sister laughed.

"I am getting used to him, but I often think his manner must strike strangers as peculiar; but, Arthur, you have not told me, did you buy that horse?"

"No; I thought it better not. There is always an awkwardness in dealing with an acquaintance. I liked the mare well enough, and Colonel Kennedy was ready to take what I had fixed to give; but I fancied he was letting her go for less than she was worth, and I don't care to incur an obligation to anyone. There is no saying, but a man of that sort, for aught we know, may be thinking of a

*quid pro quo.* I am glad, too, you would not have anything to do with his brougham, Maud. It is as well not."

"Everybody says Colonel Kennedy is very keen and close in anything that relates to a bargain," said Maud. "And I have heard his friends complain of his 'doing them,' when it comes to selling a horse."

Maud did not mention Julian; but she had a strong idea this was the very horse he had owned, despite of its present owner's plausible reason for both scar and blemish.

"Certainly, the advantage would have been all on my side in this instance," remarked Arthur, succinctly.

"I don't know about his horses," continued his sister, "but in other things he is over-generous. I do not like to have gifts forced upon me; and Colonel Kennedy is always bringing flowers, or music, or *bon-bons*—costly trifles, which I do not like to accept, and hardly know how to refuse. Now he is so rich, he seems ready to lavish all his worldly goods upon anyone."

"Upon some one, you mean," said Arthur, but he spoke so quietly, that his sister never detected the double meaning conveyed by his words.

It was the same thing over and over again. Colonel Kennedy was very diligent in his visits; he never failed to call, either early or late, little thinking that those on whom he wished to press them, had no heart for the schemes of pleasure he so sedulously proposed. Once he arrived at seven, just as dinner was served, and Arthur had no resource but to ask him to sit down to Bridget's well-dressed fish and cutlets, which he was nothing loath to do, pleased to have the field all to himself, and never seeming to imagine that he was breaking in upon the happy, quiet evenings, which now, alas! were numbered.

His fortnight's leave expired, and Arthur went to Woolwich. There week after week rolled by, and, though under orders, his troop did not embark. This state of uncertainty and expectation was harassing to men anxious to rejoin their fellows, and to find themselves on the scene of action; but Maud, though she lived in a state of uncertainty and suspense, counted each day a gain; for every hour the brother could spare from his duties was devoted to his sister, and, though he returned to barracks each night, he was hardly less with her than when preparations and business took up his time.

The dreaded hour came all too soon, and Arthur's last day in England dawned bright and fair. It was a soft spring Sunday, and when Maud, who had watched the live-long night, woke after an hour's fitful slumber, the sparrows were twittering merrily in the sunshine, and the streets, on other days so loud and bustling, lay still and calm in the golden Sabbath sunlight.

Arthur appeared just as the loud chiming bells were calling forth the long stream of a worship-bound population; and with full hearts, and in almost unbroken silence, the brother and sister followed with the rest.

Maud was glad to get out of the gay crowd, whose cheerful voices and cordial greetings smote all sadly on her ear, and to bow both head and heart in the "dim religious light." Throughout the service, it was for her one long struggle between the soul's prayer and the heart's passionate sorrow, as, with white quivering lips, she repeated the words that came from Heaven, and tried to bind to her heavy heart the promises of help in every earthly woe, of succour in every mortal ill, which God in His church holds forth.

It was not till the loud, pealing organ was subdued, and the choristers' tuneful voices hushed,

that comfort came. The larger half of the congregation had departed; solemn voices only broke the stillness of the sanctuary, and, as Maud knelt beside her brother at God's altar, and there felt the strange, heart-sickening dread, which is experienced in the great crisis of our life, melt into resignation, her long pent up tears welled forth, and she wept long, but without the bitterness which had marred her previous calmness. There was a patient, hopeful, resolved feeling in her heart, which, as the day wore on—that day whose memory will neither fade nor tarnish till she, too, shall rest in hope,—still bore her onwards to higher, holier thoughts.

Her brother's cheek was white, and his lips firmly set, as they walked quietly home.

"Maud," he said, "you must not grieve. He, who bequeathed that bread and that cup as the solace and support of all who bear His name, will watch between us. He is where I go as surely as in peaceful, happy England; and Maud, dear Maud, remember, He does not call His servants till their work is done, and their place prepared," and as he spoke he looked up to the broad, blue sky above them.

"Maud," her brother went on, in a low, tremu-

lous tone, but still with upturned face, "if we are parted on earth, there is one place where we may both hope to meet."

She could not speak, she could only cling more closely to the arm she held.

"One thing more," said Arthur. "It is not for me, a poor weak mortal, with one-sided views even of the highest things, to judge others, or to decide on their personal holiness, nor do I wish to shackle you by counsel it may be hard to follow; but one thing I must say, Maud, should the time ever come, as I think it will, for making a choice which may influence the whole tenor of your life, however brilliant, bright, or alluring the destiny held out to you may be, remember the happiness which springs only from things of earth, has little chance of enduring through eternity.

> 'He cannot faith with woman keep,
> Who holds no faith with God.'"

Colonel Kennedy was at church in the afternoon, sitting opposite to them; and as they trod the same ground they had passed over in the morning, and Maud was pondering on Arthur's meaning, he was beside her, talking, as usual, of himself.

"I don't know that I ever went to church in

London before," he began; "but I guessed where I should be likely to find Miss Bingley."

Maud said, half sorrowfully, and with a sad attempt at a smile:—

"It is never too late to mend, Colonel Kennedy."

"Oh! it's different in the country. Down at Middlemore I go to church regularly every Sunday; there is but one service, and the clergyman waits to begin till I come in."

Perhaps Maud looked as she felt—shocked.

"I assure you, Miss Bingley, I never keep him waiting. I'm too good a soldier still for that. All my servants go. I had in the house-steward, and said:—'Mind you, there's no compulsion, but men and maids are all to show at church.' It's the proper thing! I am sure you must think I was right there, Miss Bingley."

As they reached the door, Colonel Kennedy said:—

"And so you really go to-morrow, Bingley?"

Maud would not stay to hear the answer. It was not till that evening that she gave up all hope of a reprieve.

When the usual hour came, and Arthur said "good-night," he took her in his arms, and, bending his head, kissed her again and again, then she

knew what it meant, and would fain have caught at the skirts of departing time, and prayed it to return and number back the days.

A cab rattled down the street; a brave heart and true spirit following in the path others had trod before.

## CHAPTER XXXII.

"I saw a wounded hart come down to drink;
In its fair throat a broken arrow stood;
Its chest and mottled thighs were stain'd with blood;
And oft it bent its head to reach the brink,
And oft drew back, check'd by its painful wound,
Then sank with quivering limbs upon the ground:
Its dark eye glazed; while that untasted flood
To serve some brighter destiny was bound."

EMMELINE HINXMAN.

ARTHUR had written to Bankside, and all Monday Maud half expected to see Mr. Murray arrive to fetch her. He did not come, no tidings reached her, and even Colonel Kennedy, whose daily visit had come to be looked for like other habitual things, never made his appearance in Ebury-street. It was evening before the postman's rap was heard, and Bridget's little maid ran bustling up with the letter she knew had been rather anxiously looked for.

Maud was sitting, solitary and sad, over the fire,

and Mrs. Murray's epistle, with its two full sheets, looked cheering. It began well enough.

"My dear Maud. Your uncle thinks you might like to stay in town till the end of the week, and as I want you to execute some commissions for me, and see to their being finished in good time and taste, it would, I really believe, be quite as well. The long talked of visit to Middlemore is at last fixed. Colonel Kennedy wishes us to spend Easter with him, when he has a large party invited. Doubtless he has given his own invitation, so I need only add, we go on Saturday. I will write again and let you know by what train we travel, and if you do not like the idea of coming alone to Euston-square to meet us, one of the servants can take Ebury-street in the way.

"Colonel Kennedy arrived unexpectedly to luncheon to-day; he only stayed an hour, but if you see him before you receive this, he will doubtless tell you the news. Julian is to marry Lady Louis Crichton after all. It was only settled the day before he left Rome for Malta, and he writes very succinctly, giving no particulars. I have felt so sure of it for so very long, his attachment dates from so many years back, that I, for one, am by no means taken by surprise; and your uncle cannot but be

pleased at the first wish of his heart thus meeting with its fulfilment, and Fintore coming back into the family by marriage, in like manner as it went, three centuries ago. The only thing to be lamented is the possible length of their engagement: there is no saying when the war will be over, so there is no time fixed for the marriage. Mr. Murray does not wish it talked about, so do not mention it to him, though I treat you, my dear Maud, as one of the family. I heard from Ada Crichton by the same post. She certainly is devotedly attached to Julian, and I firmly believe that it is her affection for him, which has kept her from marrying for so many years.

"I have no time for more, but I feel sure you will rejoice with us, and believe me,

Your affectionate aunt,

SOPHIA MURRAY.

"P. S. Your uncle has just come in, and bids me say, you may order yourself a new dinner or morning dress, or both, at Miss Clarke's, and place whatever it is to my account; and I hope you are too wise to be modest about accepting so good an offer. *Of course*, by this time you are out of mourning."

Poor Mr. Murray! he would have given ten

times the price of any dress in London, even in these times of splendour and prodigality, to feel he had acted rightly by Maud. He had got what he had wanted all his life long, and now that it was in his hand it had turned to dust and ashes like the treacherous apples of the Dead Sea.

In grim silence he received the news; in grim silence he listened to the rejoicings, which Mrs. Murray expressed loudly enough; but when she asked if he were not pleased, he grunted out an answer, which was anything but courteous or complimentary.

He did not go to town all that day—a fact always with him symptomatic of great mental disturbance—and wandered about the grounds, and walked in and out of the boudoir till Mrs. Murray, who chose to ignore the fact, that her lord and master could be anything but delighted, hailed Colonel Kennedy's unexpected appearance as quite a diversion in her favour.

To her great surprise, and no small pleasure, his invitation to Middlemore was instantly accepted; and when Colonel Kennedy spoke of Miss Bingley as very much "down" the day before at the prospect of parting with her brother, Mr. Murray said: "Ah! poor thing! a little change will help her through."

The idea of Maud's staying in town originated with her aunt. She had her own reasons for thinking her better out of the way for the present, and Mr. Murray caught at the notion so eagerly, that his wife was very sure he dreaded the sight of a grief, whose bitterness might be laid at his door. She, on her part, wondered "how Maud would take it;" but her desire to let the storm blow over was far stronger than her curiosity.

It was an excellent arrangement she thought, postponing her return till after they had been to Middlemore; it would do away with all awkwardness; she would have to hear Julian's marriage talked of as a matter of course; and in all haste, lest Mr. Murray should relent, the moment their guest was gone, Mrs. Murray sat down to her desk, and drove off herself into Windsor, with her letter, that it might be sure to reach its destination without more delay; and so Maud was left to bear her own burden, and no human hand stretched out to help her.

That letter was enough; she needed no particulars, nor ever re-read the words fraught with a bitterness not all their own. Those few careless lines, with their studied meaning, had sufficed to

undermine her tower of happiness; and youth, and life, and love lay crushed beneath the ruins.

Still she was calm; the storm of agony had not yet burst, and she sat thinking, too full of sorrow for tears, but with a dull, cold, aching pain at her heart, which for a moment she wished might be death.

"God help me!" It was an inward not an outward cry, as she shivered and shuddered at her own dread thought. She deserved to lose him, if, as she began to fear, she loved Julian, not only better than life present, but than that which was to come.

This tremulous horror changed the fashion of her grief, and tears, not those that relieve, but such as are wrung from the heart's bitterest agony, began to roll slowly down her cheeks. Julian had never loved her, or, as memory rose up and asserted her claim to be heard—he had not loved her warmly—fondly—deeply—truly enough for that love to survive a little opposition, a short delay, a few brief months of absence.

No, she was not only forgotten, another was preferred before her, and as she told herself the sad tale, her heart throbbed, her cheek burned, and the tears, which fell fast, when Julian's name had

risen to her lip, checked their course to flow back and curdle round the sad heart, whose cherished joys and dreams of bliss were all in vain—vain as the anguish none shared—vain as the love which woke no love again.

Then uprose the vision of one loved better than herself; one who had the right boldly to say what she had scarce dared whisper to the silent night—"My Julian!"—one who had the right to think of him, to dream of him, to list to tenderest words of love, and trembling fly to his heart as her natural home and resting-place. She closed her eyes; she could not bear to look on the picture fancy drew so vividly; but in an agony of shame, that unloved, she loved—that unsought, she wept, she buried her face in her hands. She could mask with outward calm the inward strife, would she could as easily repress her grief, restrain despair, and curb her rebellious heart, yet throbbing with feelings, which if it were torture to forget, it were worse torture to remember and recal.

There was one thing to do. Her love must be put away like a faded flower, out of her own reach, far out of sight. The blossom had dropped from her grasp, the thorn only remained; she could but sit still and endure; there was no anodyne for the

smart, no cure for the pain; she found no place for pity, nor sought a licence for complaint. It had been a hollow dream, a long delusion. Months back she might have known who it was that Julian loved; and past jealousies, vague uneasiness, and suspicions, long lulled to rest, rose up in bitter strength. He was good, and kind, and gentle; she had been unhappy, and he pitied her—that was all. What would he think could he see her now? That simple thought was the last drop in poor Maud's cup, and despite of pride, despite of self, despite resolution, she was again sobbing, as though her heart would break.

She was lying on the sofa, in an attitude of the most hopeless dejection, her face turned from the light, when the door opened softly.

"Miss Bingley, my dear! do you know how late it is?"

"Do not sit up for me, Bridget."

Maud said no more, and though in the carefully modulated tone there was a sound of grief, the old woman did not like to force her sympathy.

"Poor Mr. Arthur! he felt it hard enough; sure it's a great trouble. Three such fine-looking gentlemen, and she left all alone!"

Such were Bridget's disjointed communings, as

she stirred the fire, and trimmed the lamp. Her young lady did not speak, and she left the room.

A stifled sob, a moan of pain struck upon her quick ear, as she stood on the stairs, and noiselessly she re-opened the door. A long silence followed, and Bridget went up-stairs, and laid her down, but not to sleep.

The live-long night she heard the restless feet, which paced now fast, now slow the room beneath. The dull walls saw the passionate outbursts, caught the plaintive words, wrung out by absolute despair —a word we lightly use, but Heaven help those on whom it falls with all its keen significance! What is it? but that all the high hopes and happy aspirations, which God has given His creatures here, sink down into nothingness, and meet with no fulfilment. Despair on earth is sharp and cutting as a two-edged sword. May He, who died to save, keep us hereafter from all sense or sound of that which the word stands for!

Eight-and-forty hours after it had been dispatched, Mrs. Murray got the answer to her letter. Maud wrote simply enough. Julian had her best wishes for his happiness, Lady Louis, as his wife, had gained all and more than all she lost by her first marriage.

Mrs. Murray was staggered. There was not a single word of bitterness from beginning to end, nothing but expressions of unselfish sympathy, and kindly hope—nothing to betray the burst of agony and misery which paid the penalty of the over-strain.

Maud would not bate a single effort, or allow herself any excuse, till Mrs. Murray's frippery was all cared for, and her note of thanks written to her uncle. She only said it was kind in him to think of her, and thanked him for remembering her; but short and simple as they were, these few lines went to Mr. Murray's heart.

These tasks accomplished, Maud could do no more: she could not nerve herself to see Colonel Kennedy. Day by day she excused herself, and Bridget marvelled to see her young lady sit hour after hour within the house, and care for no amusement, nor look for any change. The Colonel's brougham came only to be sent away, and Bridget donned her best black silk, and got out the shawl which "Mr. Arthur bought for her his own self," thinking her charge might like a walk; but neither morning stillness, nor afternoon sunshine could tempt Maud forth. She offered no plea of illness, made no pretext of over-occupation, uttered no

complaint, but nothing could induce her to leave the house.

"It's not the book," said Bridget to herself, one day, as she laid aside a volume Maud had been reading, and caught sight of a page blistered with tears. "And it's not the embroidery, for all it is so fine, that makes my darling's eyes so sad and soft; I don't rightly know," and Bridget shook her head and sighed, "but my young lady was not so pitiful when Mr. Arthur first went as now."

Percival arrived early on Saturday morning and brought with her the clue to this mystery. She was bursting with the intelligence of her young master's unexpected engagement, and pretty soon opened Bridget's mind on the subject, together with her own views of things in general.

"I assure you, ma'am, when Mrs. Benham came in and told us the Captain was going to be married to Lady Louis Crichton, you might have knocked me down with a feather. It's not what any of us expected, and so, as we sat at supper, we all agreed."

"Oh, indeed!" was Bridget's civil comment, but her stern pale face looked paler than ever.

"If ladies took their characters from servants

instead of vicy versy," said Percival, severely, "things would be very different."

"I've never had a reason to complain; and my young lady was but a babe in arms, when first I tended her," returned Bridget.

"*Your* young lady," said Percival. "I'd serve her without a sixpence wages. There are not many like her; and as I wrote to a friend, it were only yesterday, 'so long as Miss Bingley does not marry, I shall remain a spinster.' Never put your trust in any man, Mrs. Bridget! If ever there were a gentleman I thought well of, it were Mr. Julian."

But Bridget was too "troubled," as she expressed it, to talk. She put the best of the parlour breakfast, when it came down, before Mrs. Percival, and went up stairs to follow Miss Bingley like her shadow.

All the finery wherewith Mrs. Murray contemplated striking the natives of ——shire dumb, lay upon the bed, and Bridget packed, fidgetted, and admired, and as in duty bound, thought the white silk with triple skirts, which fell to her young lady's share, the best of all; but it was not that which was on her mind.

Percival came up to do her part, and when it came to the last, carried down the dressing box, fell foul of the cabman, because he turned the boxes wrong way up, and yet Bridget had not spoken.

She stood silently by while Maud tied her bonnet, smoothed her hair, and made her last lingering preparations for departure; but it was not till on the drawing-room floor, her nurseling turned to kiss her cheek, and tenderly press her hand, that the string of Bridget's tongue was loosed.

"Miss Maud, Miss Maud!" sobbed the good soul, "I can't bear to see you go. And I've just one thing to say. If things are not as pleasant as they might be where you go, come back to your old nurse. You'll not think it too great a liberty for me to say it, but don't I pay the rent? and Susan she lives below, and the lodgings—why they're not much to count by. Surely it's a weariness to wait on strangers, but for my young lady every toil's a pleasure. You come, Miss Maud, and I'll make the two ends meet. Any way we can hold on till Mr. Arthur is home from the wars, God bless him! and then, if you'll take me, I'll go

to foreign parts as well. You'll think about it, my dear."

Maud put her arms round the old woman's neck.

"Bridget! Bridget! why are not all the world like you?"

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

> "True is, that whilome that good poet said,
> The gentle mind by gentle deeds is known;
> For a man by nothing is so well bewrayed
> As by his manners, in which plaine is showne
> Of what degree and what race he is growne.
>
> *Faerie Queene.*

NOT only Mr. and Mrs. Murray were awaiting her at Euston-square; but when Maud drove up, the first person she saw was Colonel Kennedy doing the honours of the station, and beginning his hospitalities by welcoming every individual of his party as they arrived.

He had invited his guests with some judgment. Major and Mrs. Howarth had passed more than one summer in the neighbourhood of Windsor, when his regiment had been quartered there, so Mrs. Murray knew them well. Major Howarth was a good-looking, sensible man, with no distinguishing trait, save extreme kindness of heart;

men called him a "muff," but most ladies liked him, seeing he much affected their society, was always pleasant and agreeable, and expected nothing beyond mere friendship in return. Any young lady who had a love affair on hand was sure of an ally in Major Howarth, who had tact, and knowledge of the world enough always to do and say the right thing, both to the damsel and her swain, whether accepted or non-declared.

He had taken the fever once and for ever himself; and, albeit he had sacrificed all his advantages as eldest son to a wealthy father, in marrying without his consent, it must be confessed Mrs. Howarth was hardly worth all he had given up for her sake. Still she was a pretty, pleasing woman, with a great deal to say for herself, and an agreeable manner; and she always showed a great deal of judgment in her choice of subjects, though her conversation certainly never soared above small talk.

Professing to exist only for "dear George," she lived for society; and, moreover, the admiration and good opinion of the world, and that not of one sex only, were so essential to her happiness, that she was jealous of, and spiteful towards any other woman, married or single, who stood in her way.

Captain and Mrs. Monson were also young married people of the same calibre, but of quite another stamp. He was the son of a viscount, she the daughter of a baron; and though both belonged to a much-bespattered aristocracy, never were individuals more simple-minded, or contented to take life in a *médiocre* way. Mrs. Howarth—a baronet's eldest son's wife—rather aped the fine lady, and affected a position in society. Mrs. Monson did nothing of the sort; her husband, too, though he was in the Guards, was not rich, and they lived in an unpretending way, finding their happiness in each other, and in their children, of whom she had one for every year of marriage.

Neither cared to go out much; but they dined with the neighbours when they were asked, and she sat through the evening, looking placid, pleased, and content, and thinking, it may be presumed, about her children, for they were her great source of interest. He liked a good dinner, and did not dislike the change; but as for making society an object, or struggling for a better position than that in which it had pleased God to place them, it never entered into either of their conceptions.

Captain Monson had not much to say for himself, but he looked the well-bred gentleman he was,

and was wise enough not to love his wife any the less that she had worn the same silk dress all their last London season through, and still continued to make it do duty at any dinner to which they were invited.

The Monsons were not staying-out people; but, as it happened, they were just on the move from Windsor, and their house in London was let, and the children, save a fat baby, safe in lodgings at the sea-side, three very good reasons for their doing so unusual a thing, as paying a visit in the country to anyone, but a near relation.

Such were the people, with whom Maud found herself shut up in a railway carriage for the next two hours. The gentlemen, at least such as indulged in the pastime of smoking, went in another compartment; and while they are solacing the tedium of the way with cigars, it may be remarked that Colonel Kennedy had not been as fortunate in his selection of bachelor guests, as in the choice of the benedicts already mentioned. He was not popular with men in general; indeed he did not bear the best reputation among those who knew the world; so, despite of having asked the most desirable of London celebrities, none of them were forthcoming, and, to make up his party, he had

been obliged to fall back upon his man of business, and a barrister, brother-in-law of the same; very good people, doubtless, but hardly coming under his favourite category of "distinguished visitors."

In process of time they reached their destination on a branch line. There Colonel Kennedy was in his glory; station-master and porters, all bowed down before the great man of that region, and the while imperials and portmanteaus were being piled on the roof, the gentlemen went out to admire what was very near his heart, namely his "team and turn out."

The high phaeton just held the valets; the ladiesmaids were assigned to the care of two smart grooms, whose place was at the back of the drag; and Maud was more surprised than pleased, when she found she was expected to go on the box in company with their host.

She was not in the mood to offer any very vigorous opposition, particularly when it was represented to her that Mrs. Monson, Mrs. Howarth, Mrs. Murray, the baby, and the nurse filled up the whole of the interior of the vehicle, but she did not like it. She had not, indeed, seen the last-named lady's face, when she found a place with her back to the horses, and alongside of an

animal she abhorred—to wit, an infant—was that assigned her, or she might have been glad of any escape; but at any rate Maud felt it was something to get away from those cool, calculating looks, which had been on her throughout the journey, as though her grief was not written in her heart, but legible in her face. Mr. Murray not only threw the weight of his authority into the scale, but prepared to take up an elevated position, close behind the seat to which Colonel Kennedy was pressing Miss Bingley to ascend, that turned the balance, and Maud consented.

She was too languid and indifferent to care much what she did, too apathetic on all subjects, save one, to be afraid even of the four spirited horses which Colonel Kennedy showed off at their best paces up the narrow street of the straggling village which called itself a town. He was a man who was by no means above making the bumpkins stare.

Taken by itself, the drive was not disagreeable to Maud; at least it would not have been so, if she had only been allowed to remain in silence. The day was fine, the air was soft, and if the country was not particularly picturesque, the early spring is always pleasant, though as yet all the

green and vegetation was confined to the springing corn and banks of primroses.

Up hill and down they went, for Middlemore was some miles from the station; but the prospect was ever the same, fields and hedges, fields and hedges, with here and there a copse or covert, or a lonely farmhouse. It was a different world from Devonshire with its wild soft scenery, and not much more like Berks with its innumerable country seats and gentlemen's places.

"No," said Colonel Kennedy, in answer to some remark to this effect, which he had elicited from his companion; "this is essentially a hunting county, and not bad for shooting either; and, for my part, I would rather have a place here than in Leicestershire or Warwickshire, there is no bore of neighbours."

Colonel Kennedy was one of those people who are always delighted with all that appertains to themselves; but it was such a comfort to see anyone so happy and contented, that Maud cordially agreed with him, and he went on.

"Tusson lives down there by the ford; his is a small place, but there is no other gentleman's house within five miles. Seven, ten, or even

twelve miles is thought quite within visiting range down here."

"In fact there is no neighbourhood," said Maud.

"I don't care about it myself," returned Colonel Kennedy; "I'd rather stay at home any day than preface my dinner by an hour's drive; there's no such nuisance!"

Maud had nothing to say in contradistinction to this.

"When I have a wife, she shall have what society she likes in the house, but I hope she won't expect me to dine out. You remember the gipsy, eh! Miss Bingley?"

Miss Bingley perfectly recollected the occasion to which he alluded, and turned pale and thoughtful at the remembrance; and apparently the same train of thought rendered Colonel Kennedy meditative, for he said not another word for the next mile, but diligently employed himself in double-thonging his wheelers and touching up the leaders.

The sight of Middlemore in the distance restored him to his usual powers of speech.

"There are the trees behind the house, Miss Bingley. We turn off the main road almost directly; half-a-mile more and we shall be at the lodge gate."

Maud looked in the direction in which Colonel Kennedy pointed, but saw nothing, save a dead wall, some dark firs, and clustering tree-tops.

"I hope you will like it," said her companion, a little anxiously; "but nothing has been done to the place for the last twenty years, till I took it in hand this winter. My uncle loved quiet and seclusion, and never spent a farthing if he could help it. I got his savings, so I ought not to complain," and Colonel Kennedy ended with the hoarse laugh, which always grated on Maud's ear.

At the lodge he had a hard word to fling at the gate-keeper, which made Maud forget all she had to say.

"Colonel Kennedy is so different from—" but she checked herself in the unuttered comparison, and in silence they drove down the avenue of stately elms, passed the church, which stood embedded in laurels, and reached the house.

It was a substantial red-brick edifice, built in the form of an H; not a palace, but a very good gentleman's house. A long expanse of mossy turf sloped prettily down to a large sheet of water, which divided the lawn from the park; but there was no view—there never is in ——shire—nor was there anything like a flower-garden either in

front or at the back of the house, where the greensward, unenlivened by either flowers or shrubs, frittered itself away into the dusky woods and low coverts, where pheasants reigned supreme, and sometimes a fox was found.

Maud was tired and cold, but still there was a long, formal half-hour to be got through downstairs, before any of the ladies, except the baby, were shown to their rooms. Colonel Kennedy did not say anything of other guests, and they did not go into the drawing-room, but were taken into their host's own room on the other side of the hall, which being small was not called a library, but doubtless would have passed for such, had its possessor been a literary, instead of a sporting character.

The first gong sounded at last, and then the guests were ushered up-stairs. The room that fell to Maud's share was as pretty as chintz and rosewood could make it, a sitting-room in all but the name; and when Mrs. Murray saw it, she said directly:—

"I've a great mind to change, Maud; I am sure this room has the best aspect."

Maud prepared to remove herself and her bonnet, which she had already taken off.

"Stay," said her aunt; "I suppose mine is considered the best room; it is certainly the largest, and, besides, it has a dressing-room."

So saying, she walked off with Percival in her train, who at the moment was engaged in laying out Miss Bingley's dinner dress; and when that damsel returned, quite half-an-hour after, it was with a very lugubrious countenance.

"Mrs. Murray is gone down; I was to say she could not wait; but I thought how it would be, Miss Bingley, there is only your dress to lace, after all."

Maud's few words of response were not enough to cheer the low-spirited lady's-maid, and in silence Mrs. Percival applied herself to her task, ever and again glancing over the young lady's shoulder at the face reflected in the mirror. What she saw there did not appear to raise her spirits, if it added fresh energy to her movements. It was not, however, till she had watched Miss Bingley down the long corridor to the stair-head, that her despondency shaped itself into words.

"I should just like to get speech of Captain Murray, and tell him my mind, that I should! or, if that can't be, I should like nothing better than to see him face to face with Miss Bingley. How-

ever," this was said with a toss of the head, "there's no need to wish him any worse punishment than what he has laid out for himself," and Percival banged the door sharply after her.

"It's at Mr. Paton's option to stay where he is, of course it is; and it's at mine to stay where I am, and stay I will, and bear I will; I knew what Miss Bingley was the first minute I set my two eyes on her, and that's enough; if other people don't, it ain't my fault."

This soliloquy was the accompaniment to a change of quarters, and on arriving in Mrs. Murray's deserted room, Mrs. Percival's conduct may fairly be compared to that of a bear, who, baffled by his prey, vents his rage on the articles of clothing once worn by the victim, for whose blood he thirsts.

"It's your fault, it's all your fault," she said, fiercely addressing a bonnet. "You can't be happy yourself, and you won't let anyone else be so either! No peace for anybody's life by reason of you. Making and marring, and plotting and planning, and all against your own flesh and blood; I wonder you ain't ashamed of yourself!"

A seal-skin coat was the next victim.

"Ah! you think you're very clever, but you'll

soon get your punishment. You'll soon see somebody set up higher than yourself—somebody you little expect."

The vehemence of Percival's wrath was a little exhausting itself, and, looking into an imperial, its mutterings died away into,—

"There's Colonel Kennedy's own man, and there's the house-steward over him, and there's the French mossoo in the kitchen, that's three, and I didn't take any count of those in livery, and as for maids, there's too many to reckon. Things might be very comfortable, if they are different. Half the year down here, and half up in London, would not be so bad," but still Percival sighed.

Pending all this, Mrs. Murray had reached the drawing-room. It was an object with her to be down early; the opportunity only had been lacking, or certainly Colonel Kennedy would have asked her to do the honours of his house; if nothing was said about it, it was more than likely that Mrs. Howarth would take that office upon herself. Colonel Kennedy had said there was a point on which he wished to consult her, probably he would be dressed in good time for the chance of speaking with her alone; and, solacing herself after the discomforts of the journey with such reflections,

Mrs. Murray sailed down-stairs, and made her way to the drawing-room.

It was as she expected. Colonel Kennedy, in all the glory of a white neckcloth, and very resplendent shirt-front, stood upon the hearth-rug, but he was not alone; an old lady occupied the sofa, for whom he was putting on his best manner, such as it was.

"Lady Newdigate," said the master of the house, and Mrs. Murray was sufficiently well read in Burke, to be aware that she was being introduced to her host's father's brother's widow. Colonel Kennedy had inherited Middlemore and his money from his maternal uncle; but it was from his paternal ancestors that he obtained his good name, and derived the position, which, for so many years, had stood him in stead of houses and land.

Lady Newdigate was a very old lady; so old, that what would have been affectation in a younger woman was nature to her, and when Mrs. Murray was seated, she went on with her knitting as coolly as though she had been in her own drawing-room, a fact which rather put the lady of Bankside out. Lady Newdigate had not lived in and for society all her life, without being able to distinguish at a glance the difference between a well-

dressed and a well-bred woman, and when she spoke it was to Colonel Kennedy.

"Where is the young lady, Paul? where is the Miss Bingley, you were speaking of?"

Colonel Kennedy turned to Mrs. Murray, who had the satisfaction of being made to feel she had committed a solecism in appearing without her niece.

"She is very pretty, I hear," continued her ladyship, in rather a dictatorial voice. "You should take better care of her; Paul tells me she has a brother just gone to the East, two of my grandsons—my boys I call them—are with the army."

Mrs. Murray forthwith began, as in duty bound, to talk of the war, but she was not so well up in the facts as was Lady Newdigate, who contradicted her more than once, so that by the time Mrs. Howarth and Mrs. Monson appeared, she had quite made up her mind to take her ladyship for her *bête noire*.

"Dear Lady Newdigate! only think of finding you here; I am so glad to see you; I never dreamed of your coming so far; George will be quite delighted," said Mrs. Howarth, and her manner and voice told, if not her flattering words.

Having kissed her, Lady Newdigate held out her hand to Mrs. Monson.

"My dear, I saw the baby on its way up-stairs, it's a fine child, but your nurse tells me it is actually the sixth; I really did not think you had been married so long."

These people were intimately acquainted with Lady Newdigate, which she was not, and Mrs. Murray was beginning to think she should not like Middlemore at all.

The last down of all the gentlemen was Mr. Murray, and close behind him came Maud. She had fallen in with her uncle on the staircase, and thought to get into the room unobserved, under the shadow of his wing. Not so, however; Colonel Kennedy espied her directly, and took her up to Lady Newdigate on the sofa.

Maud was not looking her best. She was not the same girl who had come back from Ryde so bright and blooming, but she was quite pretty enough, and, what Lady Newdigate liked even better than her face, was the tranquil grace with which she moved. It was not style, which too often trenches on the vulgar, it was not manner, which may be acquired, but it was an innate delicacy and refinement, not only of appearance, but

of mind, to which every look, word, and movement testified, and which was not lost, but rather heightened, when, as at this moment, she was slightly embarrassed and uncertain.

Lady Newdigate took in at a glance the striking points of Miss Bingley's exterior, the complexion of exceeding delicacy, the soft, glossy, silky hair, so beautifully arranged; the eyes, which, if they had assumed their old and more than their old, sad, anxious look, were very beautiful, and, with a manner very different from that in which she had greeted the aunt, she made room for the niece on the sofa beside herself, while Colonel Kennedy, with a satisfied air, turned to his other guests.

With dinner came Mrs. Murray's third, nay, fourth mortification. She could have borne following the rest of the ladies into the dining-room, she had not the smallest pretext of rank on which to ground a right of precedence—that was her misfortune, but it really was Colonel Kennedy's fault that Mr. Alford, the most vulgar and self-sufficient of mortals, his man of business, his toady, his last resource when better acquaintance failed him, should take upon himself to give her his arm. The Colonel ought to have arranged it otherwise. Besides, though Major Howarth was talking to

Maud, it was no reason he should take her in to dinner; if Mr. Murray was to be paired off with Mrs. Monson, Major Howarth, of course, ought to have been desired to lead that important personage, Mrs. Murray herself, into the dining-room; and, what was worse, when there, the lady of Bankside found herself placed with Mr. Gatton on the other side, who, though a harmless, inoffensive little man, was by no means "one of her sort."

Mr. Murray had been asked to sit at the bottom of the table, and this having been arranged beforehand, did not tend to restore his wife's good-humour, who, somehow or other, despite her usual self-satisfaction, could not but feel that, far from being the principal person, she was not even a special object of consideration to their host.

Everything at Middlemore was in excellent taste, save and except its possessor; but though Percival's French "mossoo" was a master in his art, the wine excellent, and not even the smallest *minutiæ* neglected, it must be confessed that the dinner and the evening passed off but slowly, to those, at least, of whom this work principally treats.

Mrs. Howarth amused herself, Mr. Gatton, and Mr. Alford at the piano. She never disdained small conquests, which was the reason, possibly, she was so very popular.

There was whist for Lady Newdigate, in which Mr. Murray was only too happy to join, and Major Howarth and Captain Monson, rather against the grain, had to make up the rubber. Colonel Kennedy excused himself; even for the sake of his much respected aunt, he could not go through with sixpenny points, and the surety that his partner would never follow his lead, and would very possibly revoke, besides, he could not desert the ladies, as he phrased it; but it is to be hoped that he was better amused than either Mrs. Monson, Mrs. Murray, or Maud, who all appeared equally well pleased when at last the butler entered with a tray of lighted candles, and the first day at Middlemore was proclaimed to be finished.

"Miss Bingley," whispered Captain Howarth, next morning, when the party were flocking quite as formally out of the breakfast-room, as though they had met upon compulsion; "Miss Bingley, I don't mean to come to Middlemore again so long as it is a bachelor's house. When Mrs. Kennedy is installed, I shall have much pleasure. Pray remember that!"

Miss Bingley did not catch his meaning.

"I wonder who Mrs. Kennedy will be," she said, simply.

"I can make a very good guess," was his answer.

Still Maud was none the wiser.

"I know Lady Newdigate quite well enough to perceive that she highly approves," continued he.

"I don't think there is a fault to be found in the house, it is perfect in every way," was Miss Bingley's unconscious answer.

"Pray say so to Kennedy, he will be delighted. I never suspected it before, but I really begin to think he is a man of taste."

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

> "At first, there's nothing to resist;
> He fights with all the forms of peace;
> He comes about her like a mist,
> With subtle, swift, unseen increase;
> And then unlook'd for, strikes amain
> Some stroke that frightens her to death,
> And grows all harmlessness again,
> Ere she can cry, or get her breath."
>
> *The Angel in the House.*

THE hall door stood open, and while others of the party were discussing that old topic, the weather, Maud wandered out upon the stone steps. The morning sun was shining; the air blew softly, and above all else, the bells of a distant village-church, chiming for service, sounded faintly up the valley. She could trample her grief under foot, and school herself to observe the common usages of society, and by the same constraint go through with the dull routine of eating, drinking, dressing, and small talk which make up our outer life; but the cold, dead pain, the constant weight were ever

there, and these common sights and sounds woke them up to such a passionate life and energy—brought back such a rush of tender memories, that Maud could bear it no longer, and disregarding the claims of society in general, and Major Howarth, who was following her in particular, fled to the sanctuary of her own room.

These times of remembrance, with their bitter outbursts and sudden pangs, would come—times when the stricken heart, wrung with fruitless strife, recurred with a passionate yearning to past days, the recollection of which was so intensely real, so vivid and delicious, that they seemed the reality, and the blank, barren present but the dream.

Then the sad eyes would fill with light, the colour mantle in the pale cheek, and her whole form dilate with life as the magical sweetness of some touch or tone—which in memory she felt and heard once more—came back. But this was not a wholesome state, still less a happy one, and Maud knew it. It was the fever of the mind, and she battled with her delusion, and thrust the poisoned cup of sweetness from her; she would none of it. It passed like the phase of a bodily ailment; strong in faith, if weak in heart, Maud rose up in a strength not all her own. It was not always thus, it might

not last; we are but weak, erring, purblind mortals, who will not always face the pillar of fire, but hide our eyes, and turn from the brazen serpent: when the cloud comes, and Heaven's night obscures our earthly day, we forget that God's sun never sets, that the light is still there, though our troubled vision may be darkened, that God made the darkness and the light alike, and that it is not here we must look for our eternal dawn.

There was no longer any joy on earth for her; no longer any hope; but there was "the peace which passeth understanding," as Maud felt, when, with bowed head and clasped hands, she strove to take home to her sorrowing heart, and make her own, the words that we repeat over and over again, and yet, alas! so seldom bring ourselves to feel: "Thy will be done."

It did not seem to Maud as if one week only had elapsed since that Sunday, when she with Arthur knelt side by side; rather she felt that the numbered days were years, and that through a long vista she now looked back to a youth, which would be hers no more.

It was Sunday, Easter Sunday, and the calm which but an hour before had wrought upon her brain almost to madness, now to Maud was fraught

both with sweetness and repose. There was no service at Middlemore till mid-day, and as she sat book in hand, in the broad old-fashioned window-seat, Maud marked the spring come smiling on, and thought, if sadly, yet not with bitterness, of how the year between had fled.

Mr. Murray and Colonel Kennedy were pacing up and down near the water's edge, and with an unconscious kind of curiosity, Maud watched them also. The old man's hands were in his pockets, turning over, as was his wont, his loose silver with his keys, and more than once he stopped and faced his companion, who was speaking both eagerly and emphatically. Once Mr. Murray paused and looked towards the house, and Maud, as she shrank back far out of sight, fancied he pointed to her window. Whatever the subject of their discourse, it engrossed them completely; and when the one solitary bell began to ring for church, and Maud came down cloaked and bonnetted, she only then met them hurrying in.

The tie between them was broken, but Maud's heart still yearned towards Mr. Murray; he was a hard-headed, cold, calculating man; but a secret instinct told her he was not hard-hearted for her; and though he had hardly noticed her since yester-

day, certainly he had not looked her in the face, to-day he met her with a smile, and a "Well, Maud!" such as he had been wont to bestow on her in the days of her growing favour.

This lasted throughout the day, which was as dull as a Sunday must be to people who have neither congenial feelings or occupations. The main body of the guests—service over—went to fetch a walk, and then Maud thought she might again seek peace in solitude; but Lady Newdigate met her as she was hurrying up-stairs and carried her with her into the gardens, back again into the drawing-room, and kept her there a state prisoner till the sound of the first gong necessitated a release.

Mrs. Murray came down to dinner glistening in a yet more splendid silk than yesterday, and Maud, who followed in her train, was in disgrace for having donned nothing more festive than a high, clear, white muslin dress. Afterwards she thought, with something near akin to amusement, of Mrs. Murray's severe strictures on her appearance; but the great event of the day was not yet.

It came in due time, as fate and such things always do. Colonel Kennedy was the first to enter

from the dining-room; he came in early, while the rest of the gentlemen lingered round the fire in the hall. Maud was sitting on the large ottoman, which occupied the middle of the drawing-room; it was divided into compartments, two large and two small, and we may be sure it was an easy and luxurious seat or Mrs. Murray would not have been reposing among the cushions near her.

Mrs. Monson was up-stairs, her baby being refractory. Lady Newdigate, in her invariable place on the sofa, was asleep, a book, the wrong side up, in hand, and Mrs. Howarth and Mrs. Murray were talking the one against the other. When Mrs. Murray was grandiloquent, Mrs. Howarth trumped her best speeches. With her viscount, earl, marquis, duke, were in lieu of knave, queen, king, ace, and she played her cards well; Mrs. Murray lost every point; and then it remained for her to be consoled by "anecdotes of the aristocracy," the younger members of whom Mrs. Howarth always spoke of as "dear so-and-so," or by their Christian names. Major Howarth had a small place in the Royal Household, and his wife, contrary to all rule, was edifying both her listeners by revelations of Court etiquette, when their host appeared, and joined in the conversation.

Mrs. Howarth's only fault, in a worldly point of view, was that she talked too much. Colonel Kennedy stood listening to her awhile, and then he walked round to where Maud sat.

"I have hardly seen you to-day, Miss Bingley; why did you not walk with us?" began he, seating himself beside her.

"I went out with Lady Newdigate."

"I must not quarrel with you for that," remarked he, and there was something in the tone, though not in the words, which struck Maud as unusual; while she was meditating thereon, her companion continued:—

"You like Middlemore?"

"Very much," said Maud, cordially.

Colonel Kennedy did not immediately reply, and she added: "After all the discussions, how very pretty this room is; I do not think anything can be better."

"It wants one thing," said Colonel Kennedy. "Middlemore lacks one thing sadly," he repeated.

"And what may that be?" asked Maud, in all innocence.

Colonel Kennedy looked at her, but there was not a shade of consciousness in the fair face.

"Middlemore wants a mistress," he said, very

slowly. "And I—I want a wife. Miss Bingley—Maud, will you be my wife?"

He had not altered his usual tone in the least, he sat rather bending forward; but when Maud looked up surprised into his face, his blue eyes were as cold and hard as usual.

She coloured painfully, but in her utter astonishment words quite failed her.

"You are surprised," he said, "and at what? that I should seek the nicest, prettiest, and least scheming woman of my acquaintance for my wife?"

She was about to speak, but he interposed before she could utter a word.

"I know what you are going to say, but listen to me first. I don't ask if you are in love with me, but I do ask you to marry me. I shall make a very kind and indulgent husband; and believe me, love after marriage is worth all the sentiment in the world before."

"No, no, no!" Maud in her agitation was not too coherent in her denials.

Tea was brought in just then; and when it came round, Colonel Kennedy added sugar and cream as coolly to that which was being handed to Miss Bingley, as if he had been speaking on the

most indifferent subject; he did not take any himself, but he took up the thread of his discourse instead.

"Time was, Miss Bingley, when you did not like me at all, you would hardly speak to me, or look at me; now you do not dislike me; we are very good friends; the next step, and I shall be a happy man."

Maud was gradually recovering from her surprise, and the way in which she said, "Never! never! that is to say, if it depends on me," was tolerably emphatic.

Colonel Kennedy did not seem the least offended; but just then Mrs. Howarth's voice ceased, and he looked round. Maud only wondered how he had dared say what he had, for Mrs. Murray sat within a foot of his elbow. The other gentlemen were coming in, and in the buz which followed their entrance he began again.

"Take me on trial, Miss Bingley; I'm not such a bad fellow after all; I have sown my wild oats, and shall make none the worse husband for that. Come now, I'll take my name off the T——, if that will satisfy you—I know you are very particular—give up betting, and never handle a dice-box again; a quiet rubber is no harm; you agree with me

there, at all events; Mr. Murray even plays whist."

"It is not a question of what is right or wrong, that lies with your own conscience, Colonel Kennedy; I do not presume to dictate your line of conduct."

"But I wish you to do so."

Maud shook her head.

"I know," said Colonel Kennedy, "that it is not often a fair lady gives a straight answer to a plain question, but I know, too, that Miss Bingley is one of a thousand, so will she tell me one thing?"

Maud's heart died within her, she did not know what might be coming next; she only felt that she had not strength to bear the probing of a wound yet fresh and gaping—a wound, the scar of which would remain till her dying day. A sickening sense of dread overpowered her, and she grew pale and red by turns. Colonel Kennedy's eyes were on her, and she dared not raise her own, but at last she faltered out:—

"If it only concerns myself—"

"I've been a sad scamp in my day," rejoined he, before she proceeded further, "but I have never yet taken advantage of a woman, you may trust me."

The hard, unrepenting way in which he spoke of his past, did not please Maud, and for the twentieth time she contrasted him in her own mind, and far from favourably, with him to whom she ever reproached herself for recurring; she did not say a word, and Colonel Kennedy proceeded:—

"Tell me this, what did you suppose brought me to Bankside?"

"I never thought about it—I never suspected that it was anything more than for old acquaintance' sake," and Maud glanced over her shoulder to where Mrs. Murray sat.

"Tut, tut, tut, tut!" If only Mrs. Murray had heard Colonel Kennedy at that moment, and seen his face, her vanity would have sustained a very sufficient shock.

"And you really, thought I gave up hunting, and travelled a hundred miles and back three times a fortnight, at least, all this winter, for old acquaintance' sake?" he asked.

Maud could almost have found it in her heart to laugh, at the way in which he spoke.

"If it had been a young or pretty woman, I could understand it," ejaculated Colonel Kennedy, "but—" he left the sentence unfinished.

To use a not too elegant phrase, he could not

help cutting his own throat. This tone, this way of leaving something to be understood, and that something an implication of the sort of thing she could not bear, offended Maud's taste, to say nothing of her principles; but Colonel Kennedy could not see this, he blundered on.

"I may have made a few civil speeches in the course of my life to Mrs. Murray, but as for anything more, I assure you you are quite mistaken."

"You mistake *me*, Colonel Kennedy," said Maud, firmly.

"If she thinks otherwise, I can't help it," persisted he, "she will be undeceived soon. The old man, at any rate, is wiser."

"You forget," said Maud, almost angrily, "you forget, Colonel Kennedy, you are speaking of my aunt."

"Mrs. Murray forgets the relationship often enough," retorted he. "And it was exactly that, which first made me think about you. Pretty girls are not so rare, let me tell you; yet I never met but one really sweet-tempered woman, and that woman I have seen pretty fairly tried. You do not like compliments, Miss Bingley, so I mention no names."

Maud had no data beyond the instinct of her own

heart, and the superficial teaching of some few novels to go upon; but it did strike her, that Colonel Kennedy's mode of proceeding met with no parallel in her limited experience.

"When you come to Middlemore, you will feel the difference. I'm not a good-tempered fellow, I know; but it's opposition and contradiction that irritate me; and when you have learnt to say 'Paul' in the same soft way I have heard you say ——" Colonel Kennedy stopped. "Julian" was the word upon his lips, but he checked himself. He had made up his mind to ignore that phase of feeling on Maud's part; it was better policy he thought; still he could not sit and look in that sweet face, and see Maud more disturbed than he had ever known her before, without what he called "love" getting a little the mastery over his prudence.

His warmth made her shudder and draw back; and, for the moment, Maud utterly loathed him. She would have risen and changed her place if she could, but she was not sufficiently courageous; the whole party were in a circle round the fire, and there was not even a corner of Lady Newdigate's sofa to spare.

Her distress did not escape Colonel Kennedy; but he was a vain man, so naturally could not be-

lieve her feelings altogether antagonistic to himself, and before Maud had arranged her ideas, and bethought herself in what more decisive form she could convey her negative, he had clenched the matter.

"We won't talk any more about it to-night. Some of these days, when the idea is not quite so novel to you, Miss Bingley, you will let me speak to you again? I ask no promises, I make no conditions," he added, seeing the expression of her face; "if you won't have me after all, it will be my fault not yours; we are pretty good friends, eh? I stand to that."

With this he left her, and loomed large upon the hearth-rug the remainder of the evening.

Maud did not know what to think. Pleased she certainly was not, no, not even elated; nor did it render her the least less unhappy, to think that Middlemore and its master, with all his wealth, were waiting for her acceptance. Nothing could obliterate the past, nobody could ever be to her now what Julian had once been. She had poured out her whole soul in this one love, and, like life-blood spilt upon the stone, the dark shade would ever remain; no time, no friction, no gilding would ever wear it out or cover it over; more, she had

loved so completely, so purely, and so unselfishly, that there were no harsh dregs, or dim drops, no wounded pride or bleeding vanity, to find their panacea and consolation in the admiration and attentions of any other man.

Harassed and uneasy, Maud went up to bed. Colonel Kennedy did not lessen her embarrassment by the manner of his "good-night." He came out into the ante-room, and when in her turn Maud had no choice but to hold out her hand, he clasped it in both of his. He did not say a word, he did not try to detain her; but Maud was vexed with herself and angry with him—vexed with herself because she fancied she was misunderstood, angry with him because, forsooth, he would not take the denial she knew not how to convey more distinctly.

Colonel Kennedy went back to his male friends, a self-gratulating smile curling his moustached lip. He smoked his cigar and talked of women that night, as though they were the lowest animals in creation; even the thought of one good, and pure, and innocent, could not restrain his tongue; and yet, when he took counsel with his pillow, his last thought was how to secure her, whom he knew had given her whole heart to another than himself, and wherewith to bait the snare that should entrap

a girl who was the very reverse of all that he loudly professed to admire.

"Success" and "conquests" were words perpetually on this man's lips, and yet if he had known himself, he would have told how his predilection for Maud Bingley dated from the moment of the very pointed rebuff he had received at her hands at Ascot Races. It had been a very passive feeling all that summer, just strong enough to make him delight in teasing Julian about her, and to do good service to Mrs. Murray's cause, by throwing the stumbling-blocks of ridicule and raillery in his way.

In the weeks he spent at Middlemore prior to his uncle's death, Colonel Kennedy made up his mind he should want a wife; and, moreover, he determined that if he inherited the property, as he devoutly hoped he might, Maud Bingley should be that wife. It was one of his schemes; and he settled it in his own mind, exactly on the same principle that he beguiled the time upon his hands while his uncle lay on his deathbed, in resolving what he would do to improve the property, which trees should be cut down, and what rooms papered, painted, and re-furnished. There was only this one difference, he would have been terribly dis-

appointed if he had not been the heir; it would not have cost him one sleepless night, or a single pang, to give up all thoughts of Miss Bingley, provided always he got the money.

At the exact juncture that Maud returned from Ryde, Colonel Kennedy came back to Bankside in all the plenitude of his new position, and with the power as well as the will to carry out all his plans. He had not forgotten that which comprehended Miss Bingley, and, looking at her with these eyes, he marked her for his own, along with the carriages, the horses, the establishment, which were to appertain to his new position. She was just the wife he wanted; and when Mrs. Murray helped him to the knowledge of how far Julian Murray's admiration for Maud carried him, she acted most thoroughly the part she always aspired to fill, namely, that of a thorough-going woman of the world. She did not know what she had done, and her dear friend, Colonel Kennedy, took especial pains to keep her in the dark; it was only Mr. Murray who saw the game playing before his eyes, and sat uneasily by to watch the issue.

Colonel Kennedy went to work with deliberation. Middlemore was not yet ready to receive his bride; but he never sat opposite to Maud at dinner, with-

out thinking how well she would look at the head of his table, nor watched the fair face and graceful form, but with a view to the impression, as his wife, she would make on the world at large. Her quiet coldness of demeanour, her soft feminine *réticence*, far from repelling him, combined to weigh down the scale in Miss Bingley's favour; they would be invaluable in Mrs. Kennedy.

As to the matter of her affections being pre-engaged, that did not the least militate against the lady of his choice; he was the sort of man who thought it a necessity for all young ladies to fall in love; and he rather respected Maud, than otherwise, for having attracted Julian Murray, and made such a commotion in the family.

Colonel Kennedy had great dependance on what he called "luck." Luck had made him a rich man, luck had thrown the prettiest girl in the world in his way, and luck had put Julian, a rival he by no means despised, *hors de combat*. When the news of Captain Murray's engagement to Lady Louis Crichton arrived, Colonel Kennedy was morally convinced that fortune smiled on him, and that, as he phrased it, "he should have it all his own way."

Up to this point he had been very cautious in

his advances. He really had done his best to recommend himself to Miss Bingley, and had so far succeeded, that he had conquered her old original dislike of himself, and substituted a very friendly, easy, frank, and yet unconcerned intercourse in its room.

When she refused him, he did not despair. He felt so sure of his game, that he was hardly even disappointed; and by the time he had done shaving on Monday morning, he had quite convinced himself that it would be far better, all things considered, to marry at the end of the London season, than at its opening. He reasoned with himself much as he had done with her. Miss Bingley had "come round," a favourite expression with him, and they were very good friends; it was something new to be asked to look on him as a lover; but that feeling would wear off, and he might trust to time, patience, and Mrs. Murray, to do the rest.

Maud would have a very uncomfortable time of it when she got back to Bankside; she was sensitive, not to say sentimental; when the right moment came, he should step in to the rescue; she could never stay to face Julian and Julian's wife. He need not put it upon friendship then, she would be glad enough to hear him plead his

love, and by the end of the year there would be neither smile, nor tear, nor blush for Julian Murray, nor for any other besides himself. Colonel Kennedy looked in the glass, and went down to breakfast satisfied.

## CHAPTER XXXV.

"*Actæa.* A man of note and consequence,
And suitor for thine hand.
*Parthenia.* But my heart was silent,
And so—I wait until it wills to speak.
*Actæa.* Thou foolish child,
Thy heart must speak. Straight drive that from thy mind.

* * * * *

* * * * *

No second wooer may come like Polidori,
So rich, so honourable."

FRED. HOLM.

MR. Murray haunted Maud the next morning. He came into the drawing-room, which was not his usual custom, and, when there, found occupation in watching her, with a peculiar expression of countenance, as she sat rocking and soothing Mrs. Monson's baby. The six-months-old damsel did not inherit either her mother's sweet temper, or her father's placidity; but she had a great appreciation of Miss Bingley's gentle handling, and

the soft, low tones in which she hushed her off to sleep.

When the embryo vixen was dismissed to her noontide slumbers, and all the ladies prepared to walk before luncheon, Mr. Murray did what he had never done before, namely, fetched his hat and stick, and set forth in company with the bevy of fair dames.

Colonel Kennedy was shut up in his sanctum doing business with Mr. Alford, and Major Howarth was writing letters. Captain Monson and Mr. Gatton were listening to Mrs. Howarth, who, as was her habit, was making herself the heroine of the walk. Mrs. Monson and Mrs. Murray soon fell back behind the rest, the one was too delicate, the other too plethoric for exercise, and Maud found herself with Mr. Murray as her only companion. She knew his manner well enough, very shortly to be made aware that there was something on her uncle's mind, for to all the observations she hazarded, he returned but curt answers; yet Mr. Murray was not either angry or absent, for though his eyes sought his companion's face furtively, they had nothing unkind or irate in their expression.

There was one subject Maud dreaded, one topic on which she felt a latent horror, lest her aunt or

Mr. Murray might think it incumbent on them to enlarge. She had never forgotten the expressions let fall in her presence by the latter with regard to Julian; and suppose he spoke to her of his marriage, of her own changed prospects, how should she ever bear it? how nerve herself to conceal the struggling pangs, and bitter, keen sensations, his name alone had power to awake?

She walked on fast, as though to escape the subject, and then Mr. Murray began.

"Maud, I want to speak to you."

But Maud could not answer.

"I was talking with Kennedy yesterday," proceeded her uncle, not unmindful of the sudden pallor his words produced.

The name quickly enlightened Maud, and brought back the fluttering colour; but it was with a quaking heart, that she remembered that for no less than two hours on the previous morning her uncle and Colonel Kennedy had been deep in consultation. This was better than she had expected, but still the topic was not one she liked.

Her countenance did not naturally conceal its emotions, and if Maud had had the courage to look up, she might have seen Mr. Murray was purposely averting his gaze, rather than be forced

to read that which her face only too clearly expressed.

"Well, Maud?" he said, at length.

Then she was obliged to speak; she did not trouble the ear of the keen man of business with feelings, she simply confessed to facts.

"Refused him!" ejaculated Mr. Murray. "You don't mean to tell me you have refused him?"

He was bitterly disappointed. If Maud had married Colonel Kennedy without a word, Mr. Murray might have forgiven himself his share in separating her from Julian. He would have been relieved from all stings of conscience—exonerated from the self-accusation of having darkened the best and brightest years of a life, hitherto sad enough.

Maud stammered out a sort of apology.

"I never could like—I never could be happy with Colonel Kennedy."

There was something so diffident and downcast in the tone with which she said this, that anyone might have perceived some saddening change had lately passed over her prospects, and that the faculty of cheerful self-possession and self-reliance had left her. Mr. Murray saw it, and it was with anything but harshness that he said:—

"But you don't dislike him, eh? Maud?"

Then Maud was sure, which before she could hardly believe, that Colonel Kennedy had gone over all his arguments with her uncle before speaking to herself. Nor did this assurance tend to promote his interests.

"I cannot say I like him; I do not even respect him," pleaded Maud, in the low, soft tones Mr. Murray could always hear.

"I'm sorry for it, I'm very sorry for it."

It was a daily, ay, and hourly struggle with Maud to avoid betraying by despondency the smallest particle of her despair. She gave herself no time to think, she turned from one trivial conversation to another, she forced herself to feel a sort of interest in everything around her. She shunned solitude and silence as a dangerous indulgence, she dressed her face with serenity, if not smiles, and tried so to arrange her very attire, that nothing of the forlornness she felt at heart should be visible externally; but to have another love urged upon her was more than she could bear. There was a moment when she could almost have found it in her heart to turn upon Mr. Murray, and reproach him for his heartless conduct. He had known, if he chose now to ignore! As in many

feminine outbursts, the tears found their way, and quenched the passionate words.

Tears were the one thing Mr. Murray never could withstand. In the earlier days of their marriage, the angry showers, which his wife had been prone to shed, had always vanquished him completely; and when he saw Maud bend down her head and weep silently, he was softened directly.

"Don't cry, Maud," he said. "Don't cry, I'm not angry with you. I only want to talk it over quietly."

His companion dried her eyes, but she could not command her voice sufficiently to speak.

"Kennedy's a richer man than I am, a far richer man," proceeded Mr. Murray; "and he expressed himself to me very properly, not to say liberally."

Maud listened in silence.

"You'd have everything you could desire; a very handsome establishment, a great command of money, and a home in which your brothers would always be welcome. Kennedy said so in as many words."

"I could not take all the substantial goods of life, and—and give nothing in return," said Maud, nervously.

Mr. Murray looked relieved.

"Oh!" he said, "that is easily settled; in fact, I was speaking of it to Kennedy yesterday. I can't make a proportionate settlement, but I'll give you what you ought to have had, Maud, if your father had managed well."

"You are very kind—a great deal too kind," was the quick response; "but, Uncle Murray, you mistake me; if I do not like Colonel Kennedy I cannot marry him;" Maud paused, apparently hardly knowing how to convey her meaning. "If," she said, at length, "I felt differently, I should not mind owing anything and everything to him."

Then Mr. Murray understood her, and the effect was to make the lines on his face grow deeper and darker, but he did not utter a word.

"Uncle Murray," resumed Maud, "if Colonel Kennedy speaks to you again, will you tell him this? will you tell him my mind is quite made up?"

"Humph!" said Mr. Murray, but, notwithstanding, his face brightened; if it were a case of messages, he did not think the matter hopeless.

"Colonel Kennedy," she went on; "Colonel Kennedy talked of another time, and seemed to think that I might come to feel differently. That will never be the case."

At first she spoke with something of pride, but the last words were uttered with an almost sad humility.

"Maud," said Mr. Murray, in quite a different tone from that he had just used, "I promise you one thing, this marriage shall never be pressed or forced upon you by me or mine. If Kennedy chooses to persevere and win his own way, it is another thing. His dismissal must entirely rest with yourself."

The sound of her own denials had given Maud confidence, and she would have urged her wishes yet more strongly, but, happily for Mr. Murray, Mrs. Howarth turned and joined them just at that moment, and the eager, passionate entreaty on Maud's lips died away unuttered.

She did not murmur, she did not complain, but she suffered, and sharply too. She felt, though he did not say so in as many words, that her uncle's verdict was against her, and felt it the more bitterly, since, in the heart-searchings of the last ten days, she had come to know how much she had built on Mr. Murray's kindness to herself —a kindness, which, day by day, had silently grown and developed, and which, in her clinging affection, she had hoped might yet live on. She did not

forget his consideration in that which is all in all to most people, namely, as regarded money, but it was sympathy and affection that Maud wanted. Arthur was gone, Julian was lost to her, and no one human being knew, or, knowing, cared if she were unhappy. The one grief had by no means swallowed up the other, and she felt the more desolate and lonely, that there was no hope to charm away the long days of Arthur's absence.

If he could have followed the train of her thoughts, Colonel Kennedy could have asked no happier conjuncture of feeling on Maud's part than this desponding desolation, and, considering who and what he was, he behaved with miraculous discretion. Neither on that day, nor on any following, did he, by word or deed, allude to what had passed between them on the Sunday evening; but indirect means are fair in war, and Maud had the clue to the concern the master of Middlemore testified on her behalf. She knew now why he was so anxious she should be pleased with his place, his plans, and his arrangements,—why he sought for her opinion on every subject. Maud knew it, and trembled when she thought of Colonel Kennedy's obstinacy and persistency of purpose.

There was but one person in the house whose

eyes were not opened; but Mrs. Murray was far too much occupied in asserting her own dignity, to give any thought to Maud. She never for an instant suspected that Colonel Kennedy felt any interest in Miss Bingley, beyond that which attached to her as her niece, nor dreamed that it was for Maud's sake they were asked to Middlemore, or that it was Maud whom he destined to reign supreme over heart and home.

For some days Mr. Murray kept Colonel Kennedy's secret intact; his wife's utter blindness was a sort of compliment to his own astuteness; but, sooner or later, he was sure to tell her what had happened, if for no better reason than that he was secretly chafed by the devoted friendship she chose to profess for their host. He was not jealous; but there were times when Mrs. Murray's follies angered her husband all the more that she really was a sensible woman.

On the Monday following that whose events appear above, the majority of the guests were to depart. Colonel Kennedy wished the Bankside party to prolong their stay, and of course Mrs. Murray imagined it was solely on her account. The Colonel certainly preferred his request to her, and with downcast eyes Mrs. Murray undertook to open the matter to her lord.

"Hang the woman!" said Colonel Kennedy to himself, as he retreated behind his newspaper; "she's enough to prejudice any girl against a man."

And in much the same spirit Mr. Murray received his wife's propitiatory advances.

"Stay another week at Middlemore?" said he, grimly. "Well, and what is to come of it if we do?"

Mrs. Murray looked surprised, but all she said was:—

"Colonel Kennedy wishes it; indeed, he seems quite bent upon it."

"I suppose the Colonel has some object in view," remarked Mr. Murray, coolly.

"The pleasure of our society, I conclude," returned Mrs. Murray, with a self-conscious sort of air.

"An old man and a middle-aged woman! very agreeable company to a person of his stamp."

Mrs. Murray's flushed face turned a still deeper crimson.

"I think you had better take Maud into your counsels," continued Mr. Murray, who was not going to spare his wife; "she is the person who is principally concerned in this arrangement, or I am very much mistaken."

"Maud!" said Mrs. Murray, carelessly; "but you are joking."

"She does not think it any joking matter, nor Kennedy either, depend on it," was the answer.

Mrs. Murray looked compassionately at her spouse; she really began to think his keen intellect was fast merging into childishness.

"Well, Mrs. Murray, I suppose the young people have your maternal blessing?"

"I really do not understand your allusions," said the lady, loftily.

"It's plain enough," was the composed answer; "Kennedy wants to marry Maud, and she, girl like, must be wooed."

A white sort of hue overspread Mrs. Murray's florid face.

"Colonel Kennedy want to marry Maud!" she repeated. "Mr. Murray, you were never more mistaken in your life."

This flat contradiction seemed to relieve her, as much as it angered her husband.

"So you think," shouted Mr. Murray; "but let me tell you one thing, Mrs. Murray; you're so taken up with yourself, you can think of nobody else. Kennedy asked my consent on Sunday morning, and Maud's on Sunday night; you might

have heard him," he sneered, "if you had kept your ears open. I knew what was going on the winter through."

Mrs. Murray said not a word, but sat still, apparently struck dumb by this unexpected intelligence.

"He wants to press his suit, that's the long and short of the matter; and I'm sure, if you like to stay, I do not care to hurry home," said Mr. Murray, whose irritability was ameliorated by the sense of his triumph.

"Maud won't have him," snapped Mrs. Murray, recovering herself.

"She won't marry Kennedy, simply because he has a good income and she has none. Your niece has too high principles for that, Mrs. Murray," said her lord, with an emphasis which would have gone to any other woman's heart.

"This is what comes of having such a girl in one's house," she said, gasping for breath. "I knew it would never answer."

"What comes of it?" repeated Mr. Murray, who spoke with about as much calmness as a slumbering volcano, and his wife had just sense enough to hold her peace; "I'll tell you what comes of it," he persisted, finding he got no answer;

"Maud is a good girl, and even such a man as Kennedy cannot fail to perceive she will make a good wife. And, mark my words, Mrs. Murray, your fine gentlemen like a woman they can trust. Flirtations and follies are all very well for their wild days, but they had rather the woman they marry should have nothing to do with such things."

"And the reason Colonel Kennedy selects Maud is because she is head over ears in love with Julian, I suppose," remarked Mrs. Murray, who was fast recovering her powers of speech and sarcasm.

Mr. Murray's fist descended like a thunderclap upon the table.

"You had better say nothing about it, Mrs. Murray; you had better let things take their course, and make no more mischief."

"I don't understand you," retorted his wife; "*I* never opened my lips to Julian on the subject."

Mr. Murray restrained himself by an immense effort. He walked up the room and down again before he spoke.

"You can understand this, at any rate," he said; "if this marriage takes place, well and good, if not, I shall sell Bankside and go and live at Fintore myself."

"Just as you please, I am sure I do not care,"

said Mrs. Murray, sulkily. "But the present question is, are we to stay on at this stupid place, or not?"

"It depends on what you have said to Kennedy."

"I accepted, but only conditionally."

"Then you must abide by the consequences, I raise no objection. And, Sophy," added Mr. Murray, with a grim chuckle, as he left the room, "the next time a marriageable man makes a point of accepting all your invitations to Bankside, I hope you will not require my assistance to find out his motive."

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

" The joyful sun another morning brings,
I only wake to feel care's piercing stings;
The soft moon comes with silent night and sleep,
And bringeth nought to me but time to weep.
But rather let me suffer all his will,
Though his fierce anger beat upon me still,
A willing heart, and patient mind, O God!
I bring to thy severe but righteous rod."

*Lyra Germanica.*

THE visit to Middlemore came to an end at last, and if Maud was glad to get away, Mrs. Murray was scarcely less rejoiced to escape from the scene of a humiliation, which her hard-headed lord did not fail to render pointed and personal. She put the best face on the matter she could; but it was a very bitter pill for all that, not that her heart was in the least touched, still her vanity was wounded by Colonel Kennedy's defalcation, the more so, as

therewith came a realization of the fact that she was no longer young, or an object of admiration.

Colonel Kennedy only dressed the same thought in a more flattering garb, when he besought Mrs. Murray to use her influence in his behalf, and reverted to old times, their past friendship, and the days when they both had been young. Mrs. Murray always piqued herself upon being quite a woman of the world, and accordingly matters outwardly assumed their smoothest aspect. Colonel Kennedy spent that season in London, and all his summer Sundays at Bankside; and both before his face and behind his back, "Aunt Sophia" made merry at the expense of sentimental young ladies who did not know their own minds, and he, perhaps, was not altogether sorry that she should be merciless.

Maud was very miserable—so miserable that Mrs. Murray's taunts and inuendoes fell far short of the mark, or rebounded, powerless to wound. Happily for her, it had been her aunt's policy, from first to last, to ignore the existence of so much as the shadow of an attachment between herself and Julian, for raillery, or remonstrance on this tender point would have been alike insupportable. It was terrible enough to come back to the spot haunted by

the ghost of a dead love, to find the phantom of a lost joy inexorably pursuing her through all the varied occupations of the day—still standing, ghastly and cold, beside her through all the silent hours of the night. There was no object on which her eye rested, but was fraught with mementoes of a past too heavenly sweet, too deadly sad to bear contrasting with her present, vacant, lonely, hopeless life. Still she was passive—at least to all outward seeming; and Mrs. Murray secretly congratulated herself that the unhappy girl "took her disappointment so quietly;" that it was a disappointment even she could not fail to perceive, for all elasticity and brightness had faded out of Maud's life.

This forced calm, and enforced interest in trifles in which she had no part, were the efforts to which Maud's days were devoted. External helps there were none; the people, the occupations, the things in which she might have found comfort, were all prohibited at Bankside. When it was discovered that Maud went daily to teach a poor little crippled child at the lodge, Mrs. Murray positively forbade it; she would not allow others to bestow the sympathy or kindness she herself never accorded.

The fetters of old associations, old thoughts, old

hopes, old feelings, are not easily to be cast aside, and those who love one object with the whole heart must needs pay the penalty of the perilous venture. In nightly dreams, in feverish slumbers, the past, on which by day Maud dared not dwell, came back, bringing with it, too, its penalty of yearning and longing, of sharp pain and intolerable despair. Then night after night she would watch till morning broke, or only sleep so long as the body held the mind enchained: life wastes fast in such vigils—vigils during which the mind accepts no more repose than the body; and Maud was often startled to find tears streaming down her face, over which she had no control, and which sapped her bodily strength, and reduced her, for the time being, to a child-like helplessness. Then came the dread, lest one day the power of calm self-possession should forsake her altogether, and those whom she thought knew nothing of this corroding grief—those who were happy, prosperous, and satisfied, should know her as the broken-hearted, miserable, crushed creature she felt herself to be.

She had one consolation. Arthur wrote her longer, kinder, more comforting letters than ever; and in her youth and inexperience she almost

deemed that these precious missives were heaven-inspired, such strength to bear, such hope to suffer, did they bring with them. In the force of her love and faith, did she not judge rightly? God works by means—by means often that we despise as too commonplace, ordinary, and trivial for our ends.

Naaman's extravagant expectations have passed into a bye-word, and yet hundreds act daily as he acted, and deem themselves unheard and unhelped, because that which they implore comes to them in the course of events, and not, as they would fain have it, by a special and immediate interposition of Providence.

At the same moment Arthur was not quite as ignorant as Maud believed him. He had drawn his own deductions in London, and he came to his own conclusions now; and nothing helped him more than Julian Murray's pointed avoidance of him, or constrained intercourse when it so chanced they did meet.

In May at Scutari, in June at Varna, at Camp Aladyn and at Devno, cavalry and artillery shared many duties, and Arthur and Julian were almost as much thrown together, as though one common feeling had attracted each to each, instead of holding

them as far sundered as the two poles of a sphere.

The while spring merged into summer, and summer was already glowing with the tints which make the early autumn beautiful; but the brightness and serenity of the outward world were yet powerless to give Maud pleasure. Sunshine brought to her no renewal of spirits; the soft calm of twilight she did not feel as tranquillising, and the moonlight musings, she had been wont to love, were now a dangerous and self-forbidden pleasure.

It did not need Percival's objurgations to teach her she was altered, within the last few months; she could not look in the glass, and not perceive the change; nor did she ever rise up or lie down without that weariness of the body, which is the surest symptom of continued mental disquiet. With a tact that did her infinite credit, Percival ascribed the alteration entirely to health, and besought Miss Bingley to consult Mr. White.

It was in vain; Maud dreaded being convicted of any nervous ailment, or questioned as to her spirits, and vehemently protested against being thought ill. Nothing escaped Percival's observa-

tion. She knew that days of disquietude and nights of tears were not a wholesome element for one already fragile and delicate enough. She watched the bright complexion change, the wan shade come and circle round the eyes, and the smiles gradually become rarer and rarer, and then she professed another opinion.

"Miss Bingley wanted change; Bankside did not agree with her;" and she repeated it so often that at last Maud began to think that she was right.

Her mind misgave her that here, where for a few short months she had been so intensely happy, she should never permanently recover her mental tranquillity. But what to do? where to go? how to convince Arthur that she was doing right? were points that weighed heavily on her mind.

Just at this juncture cholera broke out in the camp at Varna, and Mr. Murray, in a fever of apprehension, wrote and implored Julian to return. Whether the young soldier would obey his uncle's mandate was a very doubtful point, but Maud took alarm; she could never stay and meet him—never go through with seeing him with Lady Louis Crichton, nor endure to witness the mutual happiness that fancy conjured up as their portion.

In the extremity of her distress, there seemed

but one alternative, and that alternative Maud regarded with an unspeakable repugnance. Night after night she lay awake devising plans, and inventing schemes which it only remained for morning light to show in all their barren impracticability. Even the home Bridget had offered her nursling failed her in her utmost need, for Bridget's niece had married again; her second husband was as wicked as her first had been weak; and he had not only turned Bridget out of the house in Ebury-street, but, before so doing, had talked her into trusting him with all her savings. They went the way of all monies so lent, and the reflection that her dear old nurse would be obliged to seek another service, and at her age begin the world afresh, was no small addition to Maud's present troubles. Yes, there was an alternative; if she were rich, there would be no fear of Bridget's ever coming to want.

It was a very bitter struggle. It was no longer a question whether she liked Bankside or not, that had been decided long ago—it was simply that principle, propriety, and prudence all warned her, that, under the circumstances, she could no longer make it home.

Mr. Murray kept the promise he had made at

Middlemore, and never urged her on the subject; but whenever Colonel Kennedy was at Bankside, she never failed to detect some little act or intention on her uncle's part, which betrayed how earnestly he was bent on promoting the marriage. More than once Mr. Murray let fall a few casual words, which, upon reflection, led Maud to believe he desired their union, not so much from mercenary motives, as that he himself felt as she did on the subject of her continuing to make his house her home. One thing certainly looked like it. Her aunt had been anxious to write and ask Lady Louis Crichton over from Paris, where she was, for Ascot Races, but Mr. Murray negatived the proposal. He gave no reasons in her presence; but Maud had grounds for her belief that out of it her uncle had expressed himself pretty strongly, though no more was said before her on the subject.

The idea that she ought not to remain at Bankside had great weight with Maud; and, upon the strength of this conviction, she made up her mind that her nay should be yea, and that she would, when an opportunity offered, unsay that which she had said at Middlemore. She had not seen Colonel Kennedy for some time, which perhaps helped her to this determination; but he was to spend the

ensuing Sunday at Bankside, and then—Maud dared not think of what must follow.

"Whatever is come to Miss Bingley?" said Percival, at the beginning of the week, "she's not like herself;" and indeed Maud was so torn by the contest between feeling and resolve, that it was an effort, on all the intermediate days, not to be fractious or fretful to any person who spoke to her.

Saturday came all too soon, and Maud only thought how to avoid an evening *tête-à-tête* with Colonel Kennedy; for in doors or out he was sure to manœuvre for it, and the more likely to obtain his end, as the weather was sultry in the extreme, and Mrs. Murray preferred moonlight to lamplight, as less trying to the complexion.

Saturday's second post brought a note from the expected guest—a Greenwich dinner would keep Colonel Kennedy in town; but he assured Mrs. Murray he should certainly come down by the late train, and make his appearance at the breakfast-table next morning; and this reprieve was such a boon that Maud was almost in spirits.

The first person she encountered on Sunday, however, was the Colonel. He was on the watch in the hall when Miss Bingley came down-stairs.

"You're not looking well," he said, in a tone which, if loud, was one of genuine concern. "What's the matter?"

"Nothing really, but the weather is hot, and sometimes I think Bankside does not suit me."

The moment the words had passed her lips, Maud saw the construction Colonel Kennedy put on her speech, and tried to pass on. The act showed shyness, in which shyness he read coyness, and—such is man—in that coyness, love.

"Where should you like to go?" He caught her hand. "It shan't be to Middlemore if you would rather not, but on the Continent, or to the sea, or to Scotland. Tell me, I'll not baulk your fancy, only you must not look so white."

The hand was withdrawn, not quickly nor angrily, as though contaminated by his touch, as had heretofore been the case, but gently and slowly; and Colonel Kennedy was pressing Maud so closely, and following up his advantage so eagerly, that, as the butler opened the dining-room door, that most solemn and staid of individuals perilled his dignity by almost falling over the pair.

Maud escaped into the dining-room, and took her seat at the breakfast-table with such a blush upon her cheek as had not burned there for many

a long day, and which Mrs. Murray kindly told her "looked very suspicious."

As for the ex-guardsman, he thought his way lay clear before him: surely he had secured all the approaches, surely this coy beauty had not an inch of ground left for denial or retreat: she must have him now, and the sooner she was brought to say so the better for her, and the happier for him; on the strength of which conviction Colonel Kennedy made an excellent breakfast, and talked and laughed both long and loud; he certainly did not wax sentimental on his hopes of success.

When Maud sallied forth on her way to morning service, she saw the above-named gentleman sauntering along the path, which she must follow. He was going to church with her, he had done so before now; but "forewarned is forearmed," and Percival was bearing her young lady company; and Percival having her orders on no account to leave Miss Bingley's side, and having withal a considerable spice of the coquette in her disposition, so conducted herself as both coming and going to frustrate all the Colonel's well-laid schemes.

In the afternoon, as usual, Mrs. Murray and Maud drove into Windsor to attend the four o'clock service at St. George's, and Colonel Kennedy, who

had in the interim fortified himself with much sherry and many cigars, accompanied them in the barouche.

Tact and delicacy were things of which he knew the name perhaps, but that was all; and if on the way he did not in so many words make Miss Bingley an offer of his hand and heart, he came as near it as he well could, considering Mrs. Murray's presence, who took a malicious pleasure in bantering "the lovers," as she called them, on these would-be tender speeches and allusions.

The remainder of that summer Sunday ever after seemed to Maud like the remembrance of an uneasy dream. The last thing she recollected clearly was the anthem taken from the twenty-seventh Psalm. "Oh tarry thou the Lord's leisure, be strong, and he shall comfort thine heart; and put thou thy trust in the Lord."

Surely the breath of eternity still lingered in those oft-repeated words—those words which she had heard over and over again, and never given them a meaning like that, which in this instant, swept away the mists of worldly wisdom, human fears, and practical unbelief. There was the same wail in the choral voices there had been on that Sunday—Arthur's last Sunday—her last happy

though sad Sunday. And, like a flash of lightning, her brother's few earnest words of counsel came back. She had put them away from her, she had shut them out of her heart, and never, never till this moment had the knowledge come to her that while Arthur spoke of one who loved her, she had thought of one, whom she had too fondly loved. She understood his meaning now!

As these reflections crowded back, time, place, persons, all changed, wavered, vanished, and Maud was no longer conscious of heavenly hopes, or sentient of earthly fears; past, present, future, were alike a blank.

She had knelt down mechanically when others bent the knee; but when the rest of the congregation rose to their feet, the slight, drooping figure was still in the attitude of prayer. Maud's clasped hands rested on the large old-fashioned Prayer-book, her face was hid upon the open leaves.

There was a pause, and then Mrs. Murray placed a not too gentle hand upon the kneeling girl's shoulder; but Maud was past hearing or heeding open rebukes, or covert inuendoes. Colonel Kennedy raised her up, and she did not shrink away; he pillowed her fair head upon his stalwart breast; he took the powerless hand within his

own, but there was no reproach for him in the white, ghost-like face on which Mrs. Murray gazed with distended eyes, and a feeling akin to that with which we look upon the features which will never more be conscious of repentance, remorse, or expiation.

For his part, Colonel Kennedy was surprised, but not horrified. He was a great, strong, energetic man; and after a single ejaculation, which sounded somewhat out of place, he took Maud fairly up in his arms and carried her out into the cool side-aisle, leaving Mrs. Murray to recover from her astonishment and follow as best she might, he took no heed of her.

The crowd had pretty well dispersed, only Major and Mrs. Howarth were waiting to speak to Mrs. Murray.

Mrs. Howarth liked an emergency; she had Maud laid upon a bench, she took off her bonnet, she sent the vergers, who brought water, for salts and salvolatile; she even ordered Mrs. Murray about, who before did not quite know whether she was angry or frightened.

Colonel Kennedy was not easy in his mind, but he was powerless; indeed, there was nothing for it but to twirl his moustache and look, as he felt, very

much annoyed. Hitherto he had not cared much if Mrs. Murray did "bully" Maud; he thought it would make her all the more glad to "get out of it," as he phrased it; but at this moment, as he stood and looked at the pale face, and saw how wan and worn it was, and marked the tears stealing from under the white lids and fringing the dark lashes of the closed eyes, he vowed vengeance against the lady of Bankside.

"He would come to an understanding with old Murray; he would marry Maud before the year was out; and when she was his wife, there would be no more crowing over her, or cruelty, but Mrs. Murray should be taught a lesson she should not soon forget."

He was quite in the humour to attack her then and there, but Maud was beginning to show signs of returning animation; a few deep-drawn sighs, an inarticulate exclamation, and a smothered sob were followed by an effort to turn her face away, to hide the gathering tears.

Major Howarth put his arm in Colonel Kennedy's. "Come away, let her have her cry out in peace, Lizzie will take care of her."

"It's that cursed woman!" ejaculated Colonel

Kennedy, not remembering or caring where he was; "she can't let her alone."

"I don't suppose Mrs. Murray is too kind or tender," said Major Howarth, "but I conclude this will not go on for ever, eh, Kennedy?"

"Not if I can help it, certainly. I'd marry her to-morrow if she'd have me."

"I congratulate you on your choice; I don't know a nicer girl," said Major Howarth. He could not bring himself to say he wished his brother in arms success in love.

"Dear George," was called, and on turning back they found Maud trying to sit up and tie her bonnet with very trembling fingers. She could not speak, but she allowed Colonel Kennedy to give her his arm, and he almost lifted her into the carriage.

"I suppose it's a settled thing, but I don't think she likes him," remarked Mrs. Howarth, coolly, as they drove off. "Who could?" she added.

"Miss Bingley is a great deal too good for Kennedy," was her husband's answer.

"I don't know; she is very much gone off, she is not near so pretty as she was a year ago," said the lady, as if that must settle the question, and there the subject dropped between them; but it

served Mrs. Howarth for a topic with everyone she met that day; lasted, in fact, till a fresh bit of news took its place.

Mr. Murray was standing on the door-step when the barouche drove up.

"Half an hour late, Mrs. Murray; I suppose you have been gossipping since church."

"You must scold Maud to-day, it's all her fault," returned his wife, who, having unnecessarily taken fright, was needlessly cross now, a not uncommon re-action.

"Eh? what?" said Mr. Murray, who at the moment caught sight of Maud's face, now flushed and burning, though her eyes were still tearful and sad.

Colonel Kennedy, who was only too glad to be doing or speaking, had now found his opportunity; but before he had told half his story, Mr. Murray interrupted him.

"Coachman! I say, coachman!"

"Yes, sir."

"Drive back to Windsor, and fetch Mr. White; and d'ye hear? don't come back without him."

Illness and advice were synonymous terms with Mr. Murray. Maud had crept up to her room before he heavily walked up-stairs, and entered

his wife's dressing-room. It was not her he wanted, but Percival.

"Go to Miss Bingley's room, and don't leave her till the doctor comes."

The maid was pleased enough; not so her mistress.

"Do you mean me to dress for dinner, Mr. Murray?" she said, "or am I of no consequence?"

"There are more women than one in the house, I suppose, who can fasten a gown," was that gentleman's civil response, as he walked off, not caring to discuss the point, but very justly divining that his recusant helpmate would not risk the loss of her dinner.

Mr. White arrived and was ushered into the dining-room, just as the dessert was being placed on the table. He was told there that Miss Bingley had not only fainted, but eaten no dinner, and he had heard in Windsor that Mrs. Murray's niece was to marry Colonel Kennedy, and from his previous knowledge of the personages principally concerned, these two accounts did not seem to him at all incompatible.

When he went up-stairs, Miss Bingley insisted that the intense heat was the only cause of her indisposition, and the good doctor did not contradict

her; on the contrary, he said there was thunder in the air, and a great deal of illness for the time of year. He was not a man of many questions, and Percival thought he was very inattentive, and fretted and fumed because Mr. White did not, as she afterwards expressed it to Mrs. Benham, "make half a use of his opportunity."

Mr. White the while took his own measures; he stayed and talked of indifferent things till the flush was gone from Miss Bingley's face, and the nervous agitation from her manner, and then, just as it seemed he was going to take his leave, he placed a finger once more on her pulse.

"By the way, I forgot to ask, but some one told me your uncle wishes Captain Murray to return from the Crimea?"

"I believe so."

"If he is the man I take him for, he is not likely to desert his colours, while there is work to be done, or glory to be won."

"No," said Maud, but that was all.

Mr. White took out his watch as calmly as though he did not know he had touched on what would not bear the slightest contact.

"Colonel Kennedy has left the army, I believe?" he began again.

"Yes, some months ago," was the quiet answer.

"Does he make any stay here?" was the next question.

"He will go to-morrow; at least, I believe so, but I do not quite know," was the rejoinder, in an uncertain, doubtful tone, and Mr. White drew his own deductions.

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

> "Poor little, pretty, fluttering thing,
> May we no longer live together?
> And dost thou prune thy trembling wing,
> To take thy flight thou knowest not whither?"
>
> PRIOR.

MAUD had now an ally on her side, of whose good offices she knew nothing. Mr. White had long ago conquered Mr. Murray's enmity. Which liked an argument best, it was hard to say, but the first-named gentleman usually succeeded in establishing his own opinion. He had never more need of his professional acuteness than on Monday morning, when in Mr. Murray's study, and at Colonel Kennedy's instigation, he was called upon to answer for himself and Miss Bingley too.

"In a decline!" he retorted, to the impatient lover's opening question. "Miss Bingley is no more in a decline than you are; but young ladies are not made of exactly the same stuff as gentlemen, six feet high."

Colonel Kennedy next propounded, that if her indisposition of yesterday was a mere casualty, Mr. White would probably think it no harm if he asked to see Miss Bingley before he left Bankside that afternoon.

"Seeing is one thing, talking is another, you will remember," replied Mr. White, with provoking coolness; "and if Miss Bingley is to be made ill, you had better have your interview before I take my leave."

Colonel Kennedy twirled his moustache fiercely; Mr. Murray had told him to take his own way, and now it did not seem Mr. White meant to allow it him. However, he was not to be baffled at the very outset.

"I, myself, do not consider Miss Bingley at all well; nor do I think the air of Bankside suits her," he began, dictatorially. "Now, Mr. White, what do you say to a trip to the Continent? *I* believe it would be the making of Miss Bingley's health, and, what is more," he added, turning to Mr. Murray, "I don't imagine Maud would now raise the slightest objection; in fact, I feel sure she would acquiesce in anything that was arranged for her."

"As I said before, I cannot interfere. If you

can persuade her, well and good," rejoined Mr. Murray, who, in not expressing any opinion, was putting the greatest restraint upon himself.

Mr. White looked from one hard face to the other.

"Ah!" he said to himself, "I see how it is; that poor girl up-stairs is to marry this man, whether she likes him or not. And there's not a doubt of it, but he'll carry his point, if no one steps in on her behalf. I've not forgotten last year, nor she either, or I'm much mistaken. She is ill, she is unhappy, her heart is almost broken, and she'll say 'yes' at last, if she has not said it already, if only to get away from herself and her troubles."

"Well, Mr. White," said Colonel Kennedy, turning sharply round upon the meditative doctor, "you have not answered my question, let us have your opinion."

"My opinion is, in some measure, the same as that you have yourself expressed, sir," began Mr. White, slowly; "indeed, I think it more than probable that, in her present state, Miss Bingley would acquiesce in any arrangement urged upon her." He paused.

"Very good," put in Colonel Kennedy.

"And, for that very reason, let no schemes,

however pleasurable,"—this was meant to be intensely sarcastic, but Colonel Kennedy took it literally—" let no schemes whatever, I say, be pressed on Miss Bingley till she has regained her strength. As it is, her recovery will, I fear, be a work of time."

An ejaculation under his breath was all Colonel Kennedy allowed himself; but he could not command his countenance, and that, when matters did not go smoothly for him, was forbidding enough.

" Heaven help the woman who marries him!" was Mr. White's inward ejaculation; " and it is generally the best who are so sacrificed."

" I've done," said Colonel Kennedy, doggedly. " There's no use saying anything more about it; but you will remember," he continued, again appealing to Mr. Murray, " that this delay is against my wishes, and contrary to my judgment."

" It's against my wishes, but not contrary to my judgment," was the curt reply.

" It's for her good I speak," persisted the Colonel, " and I am sure, if the matter was once settled, Maud would be content enough."

No one contradicted him, and Mr. White thought it was time for him to take his leave.

" Well, you must patch up the young lady some-

how," said Colonel Kennedy, positively, "for I tell you fairly, I don't mean to be put off again in this way. As it is," he continued, turning towards his host, "it's not what I intended, but I suppose I may as well go down to Scotland, and take my chance of finding Maud all right a couple of months hence."

Mr. Murray acquiesced, and then, rather to Mr. White's surprise, followed him out into the hall, carefully closing the dining-room door, through which they passed, behind him.

"There is every reason to desire this marriage," he began, in a confidential, and yet in a somewhat doubtful tone.

"It won't do to urge it," rejoined the doctor, stoutly.

"No, no," said Mr. Murray, "it would not do to press her; but I agree with Kennedy so far, this uncertainty weighs upon her mind."

"Naturally," said Mr. White; "so, if you take my advice, you will allow nothing more said about it for the present. Miss Bingley is far from strong, and, as for a trip to the Continent, under such auspices, it is not to be thought of; if she wants change, and I am not at all sure Colonel Kennedy is not right in that, let her go to the sea-side

quietly, with a maid-servant or somebody who will take good care of her."

"I don't know what Kennedy would say to that," said Mr. Murray; but, nevertheless, he took up his hat and prepared to walk with Mr. White as far as the stables.

"And who is Colonel Kennedy, that he is to dictate to everybody?" rejoined Mr. White, angrily, who, despite his rough, uncouth exterior, was a gentleman at heart, and by no means relished the cavalier way in which the ex-guardsman treated him. "Miss Bingley will naturally defer to your opinion, and that is sufficient."

"Humph!" said Mr. Murray.

"I tell you what," said Mr. White, who warmed to his subject, and, under the influence of opposition, grew positive, "it's all very well talking, but if this state of things is to be allowed, and Colonel Kennedy is to carry all before him, we shall have Miss Bingley harassed into a fever."

"Eh? what?" said Mr. Murray, who at the same time heard perfectly well.

"Harassed into a fever," repeated Mr. White, "and if it is such a fever as she had once before, I won't answer for the consequences; she has not strength to struggle either with the remedies or the disease."

"I give you my honour," said Mr. Murray, and he spoke in a tone of genuine concern, "I don't know what to do. I don't see my way at all out of this business. If matters only stood as they did last year—"

Mr. White was all ear, but Mr. Murray had thought better of what he was going to say, and it was not till his pony was led out that Mr. White felt it incumbent on him to speak.

"I cannot pretend to give advice in a matter of which I know nothing," he began, "but I repeat this; Miss Bingley is in no state to be harassed and excited," and, without another word, the old man mounted his pony and rode away.

The lingering spark of romance, which time and the world had not quite extinguished in his rugged nature, had been rekindled by the sight of Maud's and Julian's mutual attachment.

"I don't understand it," was his mental soliloquy, as he went on his way; "I don't understand it. If ever I saw a man honestly and heartily in love, it was Julian Murray, and she—" He tried to go back and trace out the course of adverse circumstances, but it would not do, the clue of Julian's present engagement was lacking. "This marriage is to be pressed on, because the other was broken

off; the girl's heart is not in it, nor Mr. Murray's either, or he would be much more violent. He doesn't usually take contradiction so quietly."

Colonel Kennedy took his leave that same afternoon, and Maud once more breathed freely; nor was she the only person who felt his departure as a reprieve. Personally, Mr. Murray had no liking for his late guest, and it was quite a relief to him when he went, and none the less that there was no immediate prospect of his return. This marriage was beginning to be a very sore subject with Mr. Murray; in the abstract he greatly desired to bring it about, but practically, when Colonel Kennedy bullied and blustered as he had done this morning, and many a time before, his mind revolted from the scheme. To see Maud married, and well married, too, was one thing, to think of her as this man's wife was another. It was not in human nature—certainly not in Mr. Murray's—to be blind to the advantages of a good income, a liberal settlement, a place in the country, and a house in town; nor, practical man as he boasted himself, was the old manufacturer at all above being pleased with the connection. Be his faults what they might, Colonel Kennedy was certainly well born. He

was an offshoot, not only of an old, but of a noble family; and Mr. Murray was actually at the pains to take the Peerage from its place on the drawing-room table, and, in the privacy of his study, to count up all Maud's new relations, beginning with Lady Newdigate, and searching among the collateral branches to ascertain that in futurity her name would have every right to figure in its pages, as wife of the late earl's youngest brother's only son.

That was the bright side of the picture. Its darker shades were palpable enough, and within them, too, lay the weightier reasons which in reality influenced Mr. Murray, though he had never reduced their results to a form of words. If he had felt remorse for the past, it was as nothing compared with the perplexities, which, obscuring the present, lowered yet more darkly in the future. His principles, his feelings, his affections, and his wishes were all antagonistic, and warring the one against the other, and out of them came no decisive course, either of action or opinion.

It was for Maud, in the silence and solitude of her sick room, to form a resolve, which, if painful, brought with it that revival of energy, which any decision, however sad, involves. She wrote to

Arthur a letter, which, if an expenditure of misery and tears go for anything, must have been good. In few words she told him she must leave Bankside, nor was it much more at length that she spoke of Colonel Kennedy, and his proposals; still less could she bring herself to enlarge on the determination to which she had arrived. She must join Herbert in India; it was no longer a matter of choice, but of necessity; and she went on to ask her brother to send her back instructions as to the course she ought to pursue with respect to the monetary part of her arrangements.

"I wait," she wrote, "for your answer to speak to Uncle Murray. He will not like it, but I can trust to his kindness to do for me all that, unaided and alone, I should find it difficult to accomplish."

Cold and concise as it was, it went; and that same afternoon, despite Mr. White's prohibitions and warnings, Maud left her room. Her days at Bankside were numbered; she reckoned them over and over as a miser does his treasure, they would never come back, nor she ever return to the tranquil days of girlhood, youth, and of romance.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

> "What will they say in England,
> When the story there is told
> Of deeds of might on Alma's height,
> Done by the brave and bold?"

THE October sun was shedding its bright warm rays on the sunny flower-garden fronting the conservatory, when Maud, from her favourite seat, beneath the old thorn, caught sight of a railway cab driving up the approach.

It could not be Mr. Murray, who sometimes, antedating his usual hour for leaving London, missed the carriage, for there was luggage on the roof, but it might be Colonel Kennedy; and as she shrank back behind the sheltering boughs, in the instinctive fear of being seen, she forgot to watch the traveller, who, in due course of time, disappeared within the house.

If she had only received Arthur's answer, now

daily expected, Maud fancied she should not have trembled or shrank from a meeting, which sooner or later she knew must be inevitable. Her fate would be decided, and nobody could doubt her firmness, when the resolution she had taken was made known; but meanwhile she sat with her eyes fixed on the hall door, vaguely wishing she had acquainted Mr. Murray with her determination, and wondering how she could have had the heart to keep her intention from him, when ever since her slight indisposition he had been so kind, so doubly kind, in manner, looks, and words. He would have kept her secret if she had wished it, and she would at once have been spared the pain of contravening his wishes, and the shame of appearing to act upon a sudden and unconsidered impulse.

These reflections were the work of one minute, and the next she saw the powdered footman, who seldom bestirred himself for anybody save the mistress, who considered him necessary to her dignity, set off up the lawn towards the shrubberies, with very unusual speed, and at the same moment the pompous butler came hastily down the lawn, shading his eyes from the sun and looking eagerly for some person, whom as yet he could not see.

Mrs. Murray was out in the carriage, and Maud, making a virtue of necessity, came slowly forward.

"Miss Bingley, if you please, there has been a battle fought, and Mr. Bingley is in the drawing-room," said that functionary, with excited haste.

"There are letters from the Captain. Major Bingley brought them himself," added the man, who thought some military rank must appertain to the moustached and bearded individual, who had announced himself as from the Crimea.

Maud did not stay to correct him, but flew on towards the house, and into the drawing-room.

"Arthur, Arthur!"

"Edgeworth, if it's all the same to you," coolly said a tall, sunburnt individual, laying down the newspaper he had taken up, but not troubling himself to rise from the arm-chair, into which he had thrown himself.

"There, Maud! that will do," he added, getting up, and putting aside her clinging arms. "I suppose you didn't expect me," he continued, first poking the fire, and then standing up with his back to it after his own, and other Englishmen's most orthodox fashion.

"I never dreamed of you, I thought it was Arthur," began Maud.

"Ah! the fellow told you I came from the Crimea; well, I was coming home from India on sick leave, and it's not every day there is a European war, so I thought I'd go and see what out fellows were about. Constantinople ain't so far out of the way after all; I got to Varna well enough, and I found Arthur just on the move—and a miserable time he and the rest of them out there have had of it."

"But he is well?" said Maud, anxiously. "He says he has never had a day's sickness."

"Oh! he's all for honour and glory," retorted Edgeworth, "and I expect he will be named in the dispatches," he added, with a little touch of family pride; "at least he ought to be."

"What dispatches?" said Maud; "we had the telegraph four days ago."

"Oh! I forgot," resumed Edgeworth, "you people don't know anything more than that we have gained a great victory. I came home with the aid-de-camp, who brought the dispatches to the Queen. He was in India a few years ago, and knew Herbert, so I took the opportunity of coming with him. He's the best fellow in the world, though he is a regular swell," said Edgeworth, almost enthusiastically, for though a year older and a year wiser, he was Edgeworth still.

"But the engagement?" interrupted Maud, pale with anxiety.

"Well, it was fought on the banks of the Alma. It was something to see," said Edgeworth, warming to his subject. "It looked like a military spectacle, at first, from the heights where I stood, when our troops advanced in two long lines, but it was no fun for the Russians, I can tell you."

"Then Arthur's battery was engaged, and—" faltered Maud.

"Arthur's battery had a gallop after the enemy the day before I tell you, and at the end of the engagement they were firing away as coolly as if they were punishing the hillocks on Woolwich Common, instead of pitching it into the grey coats, who went off like sheep."

Maud's nervous excitement was so great that Edgeworth did not notice she was more agitated when at length she said, "and Julian?"

"Oh! Julian's all right. His regiment looked very well and frightened the enemy, I dare say, but they did not sheath their maiden swords in human flesh, or have a chance of it either," returned Edgeworth; "but he's a good fellow, Maud, after all, and stands a deal of chaff."

"You have seen him then?" was all Maud could force herself to say.

"Seen him! I should think so," retorted Edgeworth, "or I should not have been here now. I lived almost as much with him as with Arthur, and he made me promise to come straight to Bankside. I gave his letter to the man who let me in, and here's one from Arthur for you, Maud," added her brother, opening his pocket-book.

Maud tore open her missive.

"There's a letter for Lady Louis Crichton in old Murray's envelope," said Edgeworth, mischievously. "I saw it, though Julian tried to hide it; if I were you, Maud, I would not allow that sort of thing."

She tried to say the three simple words, "they are engaged," but her voice failed her, and Edgeworth went on.

"If you must needs water that letter with tears, I shall just step out, and have a cigar; but if you cry when Arthur is all right, what are you to do, Maud, if he is to be killed or wounded?" and with this very consolatory speech her brother left the room.

Edgeworth was in his element on this occasion, for, if not a hero himself, he bore about him the reflected light of great and valiant deeds. He went out to the door when the carriage came home,

and putting aside Maud, with his best manner introduced himself. He was the bearer of great news, and told his story well; and when the greater events had been detailed, and the well-dressed dinner was before him, his feeling allusion to the ration beef and biscuit, of which he had had a month's experience, moved even Mr. Murray to a smile, though Maud fancied he had been more than usually grave since the moment, when, after a cursory glance at his letter, he had gone off into his study to read and con it over at his leisure.

Reserve made no part of Edgeworth's character; he was a shrewd and sarcastic observer, and anecdotes, which have been in everybody's mouth since, were new then, and lost nothing by his mode of telling. Mrs. Murray evidently liked him; he was not unlike herself, and she took far more pains to draw him out, and make him feel at home than she had ever been at for the sake of either of her other nephews; but as Edgeworth gradually ceased to be on form, and became more intimate with his new relations, Maud began to tremble lest he should indulge in any of the strange vagaries, or modes of speech, which were habitual to him, but none the less out of place before her aunt, or with a man of Mr. Murray's age.

Her fears were not altogether unfounded; the gentlemen had not been in the drawing-room five minutes after dinner, before Edgeworth turned to his sister.

"I say, Maud, what made you keep Lady Louis Crichton's engagement to Herbert such a secret?"

Two servants were in the room handing about coffee, and a dead silence followed this announcement, for Maud did not know what to answer, and no one else spoke.

Edgeworth knew he had made a sensation, and was gratified, but he had not the tact to perceive that this time he had not chosen a pleasant theme, so he persisted.

"It was all very well to hold your tongue, while the thing was going on; but why you were to keep it close when she behaved so atrociously, I can't conceive. I suppose Lady Louis bade you, was not that it?" he added, with a sneer.

"Yes," said Maud, faintly. She had caught sight of Mr. Murray, sitting bolt upright in an attitude of extreme attention, and of her aunt's face flushed with indignant surprise.

"It would just serve Lady Louis right to tell everybody! but she plays her cards well; for Julian, who was in the thick of it at Ryde, persisted that

I was mistaken; he must needs apply to Arthur for the rights of it, and there was no end of a correspondence, for our excellent brother was pretty nearly as shilly shally about it, as you yourself, Maud."

"If I understand rightly, you are speaking of what passed in the Crimea between Julian and yourself," said Mr. Murray, speaking to Edgeworth, but looking over his spectacles at Maud.

"Yes, the other business was over last year, when Herbert and I left England," returned Edgeworth, flippantly. "If he had taken my advice he'd have got the best of it then; as it was, Lady Louis wrote after him to India, and begged for all her letters back. If Herbert had been half a fellow, and held them *in terrorem* over her, she would have married him and been thankful."

"It's a very strange business," ejaculated Mr. Murray; but he took it so quietly that Maud could not think that this was the first he had heard of it.

"I see nothing odd in it," began Mrs. Murray, recovering from her astonishment. "Ada Crichton is very handsome, and Herbert falls in love with her; naturally enough, she does not think he can be in earnest; the idea of her marrying him is so

very ridiculous; but out of regard for us she passes over his presumption. I understand it all perfectly."

"I don't agree with you, Mrs. Murray; I think it only right to say I don't agree with you," repeated her husband.

"There can't be two opinions on the subject," began Edgeworth, angrily. "Lady Louis Crichton has behaved abominably. She accepts Herbert, and after keeping him dangling after her for months, throws him over without a word, or rather he threw her over. I put him up to that."

"Ah! Lady Louis could tell a very different story, I suspect," began Mrs. Murray, shaking her head at Edgeworth with affected playfulness, while her very hands trembled with suppressed passion. "But I must not scold you, of course you take your brother's part."

"And it is not at all unreasonable that he should," put in Mr. Murray. "And now, if you please, we will let the subject rest, it is not a pleasant one, to me at all events."

He spoke so authoritatively that even Edgeworth, though not much given to submission, did not dispute his dictum, and Mrs. Murray entered no further protest against it than could be ex-

pressed by a disagreeable, scoffing manner, which she assumed not so much towards Edgeworth—who was the real offender—but put on whenever, in the course of conversation, she addressed either Maud or Mr. Murray.

As for Edgeworth, far from being abashed by the uncomfortable turn the conversation had taken, he began again upon a topic almost as *in-à-propos*.

"I say, Maud, what on earth possesses you, to think of going out to India? Take my word for it, nobody who had a choice of coming home would be fool enough to stay there."

Maud could have cried with vexation, and it did not diminish her distress when Mr. Murray turned to her and said, "What, Maud, you thinking of India? I can't believe it."

"I thought—I wished—I fancied perhaps—" nothing coherent came of her attempts at an explanation.

"If you did not know your own mind, what made you write off to Arthur, as if it was a matter of life and death? He is in a state of mind about it, I can tell you," continued Edgeworth.

Mr. Murray got up, took his lamp from a side table, and walked off without a word. He did not go up-stairs, for Maud heard his heavy step cross-

ing the hall on his way to his study, and was so sure he was annoyed, so grieved to have even appeared ungrateful, that she forgot to make any reply to Edgeworth's last remark.

"Maud does not answer for herself, so I must speak for her, I suppose," began Mrs. Murray, with her little ringing laugh, and a mischievous sparkle in her eyes. "Don't be angry, Edgeworth, but your sister has quarrelled with her bread and butter, and that, I suspect, is the secret of this grand scheme. Now, Maud, have I not guessed right?"

An eager gesture was all the response Maud could make; she tried to keep back her tears, but they already filled her eyes, and Mrs. Murray went on.

"It is all very well abusing Lady Louis Crichton, but Maud has been doing just the same thing. Colonel Kennedy proposed to her at Easter, and has not got his answer yet."

"I say, Maud," interrupted Edgeworth, "this won't do."

"No, Maud," said Mrs. Murray with emphasis, "you won't be able to follow where Lady Louis leads, you may as well give that hope up."

Edgeworth looked from one to the other; he

was quite acute enough to know that something more was meant by this speech than met the ear, and, with all his love of fault-finding, he had a sort of natural affection for his sister, though he seldom demonstrated it.

"Come, Maud, speak up for yourself. I'll see you get fair play."

"You could not have a better opportunity," said Mrs. Murray, "for I heard from Colonel Kennedy by the second post. He is coming next week."

The door opened. "My Master wishes to speak to Miss Bingley in his room," said the butler.

Never was there a more welcome diversion. Maud felt it was useless to attempt any explanation with Edgeworth in Mrs. Murray's presence, and she knew it was still more useless to plead her cause with one, who had prejudged her long ago. She got up and left the room; and flew rather than walked down the few steps into the hall, crossed the dining-room, opened the study door, and was half way through her explanation before she had time to question the wisdom of an impulse, which led her to justify herself before she was much as accused.

"Eh? what?" said Mr. Murray. "What

that you are saying, Maud?" and he put an open letter into his desk, locked it, and turned his chair round so as to face the agitated speaker.

"Edgeworth does not know, Edgeworth does not understand," she began.

"It appears to me that he has told nothing but the truth," interrupted Mr. Murray. "Whether under the circumstances he had better remained silent is another question, but now things must take their course. It is not you who are to blame, Maud."

He paused, and Maud had time to collect her faculties, and to discover that while she was explaining one of Edgeworth's diatribes, Mr. Murray was speaking of another; but anything rather than be obliged to talk of Ada Crichton, whether it were with reference to Herbert or Julian.

"Uncle Murray," she recommenced, and this time more slowly, "I must tell you where I have been wrong. I wrote to Arthur about going to India; I ought to have consulted you."

Mr. Murray knit his brows.

"It was after Colonel Kennedy's last visit; I was very, very unhappy," and here Maud's voice faltered, but she persisted. "Many and many a time since I have felt I must tell you, but when I

came to speak the words, I found I had not courage enough to say to you that I must go."

Maud was in tears, and Mr. Murray was not himself unmoved.

"Uncle Murray," she reiterated, "I cannot express all I feel, but I am not ungrateful, I do love you," and she stooped down and kissed the old man's withered hand.

Spontaneous tokens of affection had not often come in Mr. Murray's way, and he was proportionably affected. It only wanted this to thaw the band of ice, which time and the world had congealed about a heart, which was not really cold. He was very fond of Maud; but the transitions between pity, liking, appreciation, and regard had been so gradual and imperceptible in the course of the last year—she had won her way so quietly and unpretendingly—that it had remained for Edgeworth's sudden announcement and her own burst of feeling to teach him, not only how tenderly he had learnt to regard her, but how completely he had come to identify her interests and her future with those in which his own affections were so completely bound up. His most prompt answer betrayed him.

"Maud," he said in a voice which was by no

means hard or harsh, "I acted against my better judgment when I let Julian go away. What is done cannot be undone, but, with my consent, you will never go to India."

It was the first time for months he had named that name to Maud, and even in the midst of all her agitation it sent a thrill, which was not altogether pain, through her heart.

"After all," said Mr. Murray, recovering himself, "it is only a question of means, and I told you the other day, Maud, I should see you were provided for."

Maud would have thanked him, but Mr. Murray cut her short, and she had not sufficient command over herself at that moment to go on to another subject, which stood in her mind as the antithesis to her scheme for leaving Bankside. For the time being Mr. Murray's thoughts were entirely diverted from his original purpose in sending for Maud, no small proof of his affection for her.

"And what does your brother say? what does Arthur think of your plan?" he went on.

"He does not write at any length, I am to have a more decided answer next time," said she, producing a short and hurried scrawl dated "the Heights of the Alma."

Mr. Murray settled his spectacles on his nose, and began to read in a low and indistinct manner, emphasising a sentence here and there with a comment on the same.

"There is no occasion for an immediate decision. 'Very true.' A step involving so many results requires more consideration than I can at this moment accord it. 'Just so, very well put, indeed.' I am not without a hope that Edgeworth's unexpected return may in some sort change your determination. He seems disposed—any pecuniary assistance in my power—a year may see many changes—an end to this campaign—'ah, yes!'" concluded Mr. Murray, "your brother sees the matter just as I do; he was always right-thinking even as a boy."

Praises of Arthur always went straight to Maud's heart, and she brightened up directly, while Mr. Murray eagerly clenched the matter in hand by saying:—

"A day or two, or even a few more weeks, can make no great difference. We will wait and see what Edgeworth talks of doing. Arthur speaks very properly of your being with him, for a time at least. It seems but natural, I must think, after all, and it was only yesterday White stopped me on my

way to the station and told me he thought change very advisable for you."

Maud was relieved, almost happy. She had had time in the course of the last six weeks to reflect what her life in that far distant land would be—isolated and estranged from all her heart clung to, Herbert only excepted; and Herbert, though Maud would have shrunk from making such an avowal in words, was the one of her brothers, who, though professing the most, was the least practical of the three. India was a contingency still, but a far off contingency; a more pressing source of disquietude at the present moment was the probability of Colonel Kennedy's speedy re-appearance on the scene of action. Mr. Murray had passed over Arthur's allusion to the subject in utter silence, and Maud was left to conjecture from what had gone before what were his convictions now. Mrs. Murray would be merciless, and, even unbiassed by her, Edgeworth would be sure to take a one-sided view of an affair, which to his sister was not a matter of expediency, but of the utmost moment.

It was one thing to wish to bring the subject to an issue, another to find words and composure to introduce it decorously. While Maud was hesitating and demurring, Mr. Murray, who had

turned round to his desk again, startled her by saying:—

"And now that is settled, I wish to ask you a question or two. Was Herbert ever positively engaged to Ada Crichton?"

Maud trembled, but she answered forthwith: "He proposed to her, she accepted him, but no time was ever fixed for their marriage."

"Phew! phew!" was the only sound which escaped Mr. Murray's lips, that being a respiratory action, which in any excitement he was wont to indulge in.

"When did he propose to her? do you happen to know that?" was his next query.

"When they were here together," said Maud, innocently.

"Here! are you quite sure? under this very roof?" questioned Mr. Murray, eagerly.

"I know it was the day Lady Louis left Bankside in the evening."

"Upon my word!" ejaculated Mr. Murray; the next minute he recovered himself.

"Your brother told you, of course?"

"No, Lady Louis gave me the first hint of it; Herbert confirmed it when she was gone."

"Did she ever speak of it again?"

"Yes," said Maud, "when I was in London with her, she talked of little else."

Mr. Murray shook his head portentously, and seeing the effect her words had produced, Maud exerted herself to speak.

"Uncle Murray," she began, "it is only fair to tell you, that from first to last Lady Louis hesitated. I used to think her doubts assumed to test poor Herbert; now I know better, they were real not feigned."

The effort this statement cost her did not escape Mr. Murray. "You may excuse her, Maud, and you mean well, but nothing can palliate such conduct. She begins with deceit, and ends in falsehood—downright, positive, confirmed falsehood. I could not have believed it of her father's daughter;" and it was more in sorrow than in anger that Mr. Macmillan's whilome partner spake.

Maud sighed, she was not thinking of Julian now, but of Herbert, poor Herbert, whose life seemed darkened by the shadow of this lost love—a shadow which he had imbued with life, and yet looked back to with longing and regret. His were the letters of a man, the springs of whose energies were sapped. His profession had grown distasteful to him, the dull routine of military duty did not

suffice to fill up the void left by the dream so cruelly dispelled, and his sister dreaded lest it should add to the bitterness of his enthralment when he should hear by whom he had been supplanted. She had never had the courage to plant that barbed, poisoned arrow, but Edgeworth must learn the truth soon, and through him the knowledge would surely come to Herbert. Would it work a cure? Would the cruel cautery work a cure? Maud sighed again, and the question passed unanswered, for then Mr. Murray spoke.

"And now I want to know when this business came to an end? Before Herbert left England, I presume."

"Yes," said Maud, colouring painfully at the remembrance; "he broke it off at Ryde."

"He broke it off!" repeated Mr. Murray.

"He wrote and told her she must decide one way or the other; Lady Louis never answered his letter. At the week's end Herbert started for India."

Mr. Murray nodded his head. "I understand, I understand," said he.

A sound of opening doors, of cheerful voices, and of a ringing laugh came through the intervening space, and Mr. Murray got up and went out into the dining-room, as though to meet his wife.

"Good-night, my dear, God bless you," he said, as Maud passed, and for the second time since she came a stranger within his gates, Mr. Murray kissed the soft round cheek, which was as hot and burning now, as once before it had been cold and chill.

## CHAPTER XXXIX.

> "Be not amazed at life, 'tis still
> The mode of God with His elect,
> Their hopes exactly to fulfil
> In times and ways they least expect."
>
> *The Angel in the House.*

BEFORE a week had elapsed, Bankside was deserted. On the second morning after Edgeworth's arrival, Mr. Murray announced that he was going to Paris, possibly further, and, amid a storm of exclamations from Aunt Sophia, the truth flashed upon Maud. He was going in search of Lady Louis Crichton.

"The day after to-morrow," said Mrs. Murray, "it is too absurd; I shall never be ready."

"The chances are, I shall be back again by the time your preparations are completed, Sophy," said her husband, who was in quite good humour enough to enjoy the surprise and discomfiture of his better half.

"But Colonel Kennedy may come any day," pleaded she.

"Any day is no day, and, what is more, you are quite capable of entertaining him all by yourself."

"I am not going to be left behind," pouted Mrs. Murray, who could never quite forget the airs and graces of her youth.

"It quite depends on circumstances, or rather, I should say, on yourself, whether you go or stay."

That was all which passed in public; in private probably Mr. Murray made his own conditions, and they were accepted apparently without a demur, for not two hours had elapsed before Mrs. Murray was giving orders, and in all the excitement of preparation for that which had long been the great desire of her heart, a trip to Paris, and a tour on the Continent.

Edgeworth's comment was characteristic.

"I say, Maud, this move don't suit my book at all; I had quite made up my mind I should be asked to stay the winter here," and he stirred the drawing-room fire, which was already burning fiercely, and settled his arm-chair comfortably, exactly in the centre of the hearth-rug. "If 'madame' would only stay at home herself it would not signify; she don't put me out. A

little sparring and argument break no bones, and the establishment could go on all the same without the old fellow. I'd keep the cook up to her collar."

"Aunt Sophia has been planning an expedition to Paris for more than a year; she will be sure to go," said Maud, quietly.

"I tell you what, Maud, you have the whip-hand of old Murray; you needn't deny it. I found it out before I had been four-and-twenty hours in the house. Now be a good girl, look out for a comfortable berth for yourself and me too. We'll go share and share alike; who knows, but what we are to keep Bankside aired till their return? I, for one, have no objection."

Maud shook her head.

"Uncle Murray's mind is made up; I saw it in his face this morning."

"He's not going to domineer over you, I can tell you," growled Edgeworth, with a sudden change of humour, to which Maud was too well habituated to feel surprise. "You're my sister, and you'll stay with me; Arthur made me promise as much."

"We should be happy enough together all the winter through," returned Maud, cheerfully, who had a very tolerable idea this was what Mr. Murray intended.

"I'm not going to stay here to be turned out," said Edgeworth, who was not always consistent, and generally communicated his ideas as they arose, without further deliberation. "I shall go to Torquay, and if you like you may come too."

It was ungraciously announced, but not unkindly meant; and Maud, who perfectly well understood talking her brother into good humour, was struck, and not for the first time, with the similarity in temper and disposition between Mrs. Murray and Edgeworth. The only difference was, that while Arthur and Maud regarded the latter as an overgrown but sapient baby, who, spoiled by indulgence, was to be coaxed into good humour, nobody could suppose that the former's youth justified her petulance, which in the course of years had lost all originality and quaintness, and degenerated into an habitual ill-temper, which was anything but graceful.

Maud was right; when Edgeworth went out to smoke his cigar, he fell in with Mr. Murray, and though Maud rather fearfully watched her brother, who walked down the carriage-road, hunching his shoulders, and shuffling in his gait, as though he were the old man, he came back in excellent temper.

"I say, Maud," he reiterated, "old Murray's a

regular trump, after all. He books up for all your expenses at Torquay, or anywhere else we may like to go. You're to come back here whenever you please, or you may go travelling with me if I'm inclined to take you. It's all serene as far as he is concerned, and he's invited me to come back when you do."

"And when are we to start?"

"The same day the other folks do, to be sure. But, I say, Maud, it's too absurd of you to talk of going out to Herbert, when old Murray's sure to provide for you, sooner or later. I wish I'd as good a chance of a competency! Besides, I can't help thinking you'll marry Julian, after all."

"No, never!" interrupted Maud.

"Now don't be a fool.

> Don't be like Miss Jane Baxter,
> Who refused all the men before they ax'd her!

I'll take care you don't play fast and loose with Julian. He is a great deal too good for you, I can tell you."

Maud sat silent; Edgeworth would know better some day, but she could not tell him.

"If it were not for that chance," he went on, "you'd have been a fool to have refused Colonel Kennedy; and if I were you, I don't know but

what I'd take him still. It would serve Julian out, who's been all this time making up his mind. However, Arthur says 'Kennedy's a blackguard,' with all his money."

"Arthur!" ejaculated Maud. "Arthur said so?"

"How you take one up! 'Blackguard' was what he meant, if it was not exactly what he said. But you and Arthur are so alike. He was just wrath when I told Julian about it."

"Oh! Edgeworth."

"Oh! Edgeworth," echoed her brother; "you may say 'Oh! Edgeworth,' but if I'd not just happened to let it out, I should never have found out how spoony Julian is. He turned as white as any sheet, as old Bridget would say."

Maud did not know Edgeworth considered her refusal of Colonel Kennedy as quite a feather in her cap, nor that he was likely in consequence to treat her with much more consideration than he had ever done before. He had already, in his own opinion, vindicated the honour of the family by insisting to Mrs. Murray that his sister had every right to do as she liked; and not being particularly scrupulous in the questions he asked, or the answers he gave, he had gained a decisive victory in every

argument on the subject, and actually succeeded eventually in inoculating Mrs. Murray with the notion that it was a very good thing, that her whilome friend and present enemy, should be humbled by a rejection of his reiterated suit.

His sister fancied Edgeworth had been taken into Mr. Murray's confidence on the same subject; but if he had, no persuasions and no stratagems could prevail on him to disclose the fact, and Maud was left in ignorance till the last day came, when, as it happened, she went down alone in the carriage to meet Mr. Murray at the station.

"Maud," began her uncle, directly they had left the town of Windsor behind them, "I think it would be as well if I wrote to Colonel Kennedy, particularly as he offered himself for a visit next week. I shall just say Mrs. Murray and myself are leaving England unexpectedly, and, on our return, shall be glad to see him."

He might have added that the rough draft of this concise missive was safely locked up in his desk, awaiting revision and correction.

"And, Uncle Murray," said Maud, with something like a return to her old natural manner, "I may stay away till he has come and gone."

Mr. Murray thought it very prettily put.

"And so, Maud," he said, shaking his head with assumed gravity, "so you have quite hardened your heart."

"If you would say as much to him, Uncle Murray," began Maud, beseechingly.

"No, no," said Mr. Murray. "No, from first to last I have said I would not interfere either way, and I must keep my word."

Maud looked distressed.

"My dear," said Mr. Murray, kindly, "it will be mortification enough, without my making a marked thing of it. I shall simply say that you are quite recovered, and contemplate passing the period of our absence at the sea-side with your brother, recently returned from India. If Kennedy is a wise man he will take the hint, and see that I purposely abstain from saying where you are to be found."

There was no need for Maud to express her satisfaction. Her countenance testified to it plainly enough.

"And there's another thing, Maud," said her uncle; "I don't like your being left quite on your own resources."

This was Mr. Murray's way of saying he did not feel satisfied in entrusting her entirely to Edgeworth's tender mercies.

"If you are ill, or anything were to happen, it would not do; so I have seen Bridget and settled with her. She goes down to Torquay by the same train that you do, to-morrow;" and this time Maud's satisfaction was not voiceless.

"She's a good woman," remarked Mr. Murray; "and, till to-day, I did not know she had met with reverses. She tells me you have been sending her money, Maud; keeping her, in fact."

"I did not give her much," said Maud, blushing; "I should have been glad to have done more."

"You did what you could," rejoined Mr. Murray, unconsciously paraphrasing high and holy words; "but you should have told me, Maud."

"I did ask you, Uncle Murray, if nothing could be done to get Bridget's savings back."

"And I forgot it, eh? However, I went to Gatton to-day before I left the city, and put the matter into his hands. I've no doubt he will be able to frighten her nephew into giving the money up. And now there's your aunt and Edgeworth coming to meet us; we'll get out, and all walk round the gardens together."

Edgeworth not only had his opinions, but held them pretty strongly; and perhaps he was right

when he determined to locate his sister in a part of Torquay, where old associations would be out of sight. In his choice of a dwelling he carefully eschewed the vicinity of Brabœuf, and could never even catch sight of the little house on the hill, without anathematising it as "wretched," but he was to a certain extent reasonable; he had not lived for a whole year on his own resources without learning wisdom by experience; and when he found Mr. Murray had put a bank note into his sister's hands, and told her he should give her as much more when quarter day came, and so on in futurity, he laid aside all his grandiloquent projects of a house and establishment, and contented himself with taking apartments in a villa, which he pronounced "the best of the new erections."

There was a grand sea view, if not the one to which she had been used, and a garden which stretched down to the rocks overhanging the beach; so Maud on her part was quite content to pledge herself that Edgeworth should never be expected to get up to breakfast, or asked to dine earlier than half-past six.

On the whole, Edgeworth was amenable enough. He sought out his own amusements, and made himself happy after his own peculiar fashion, and

his sister was his resource when he was ill, or fancied himself to be ill—a not unfrequent contingency. Then Maud was not allowed to leave him, otherwise she was at liberty to follow her own pursuits, and seek occupation and interests for herself as best she might. Edgeworth did not care about society, and his sister had not the habit of making acquaintance; she had a few old friends, and that was all; but Maud was content, and more than content.

Amid the quiet of old scenes and loved associations, her griefs and wounds of heart grew still; it was not alone the hush of nature, or of the sea, but she had come back to the spot where she had first learned to find comfort in the church's ordinances. At the time of her confirmation, attendance at daily service had been for Maud simply an offering of faith and obedience; in the times of darkness and distress that followed, it had been that which had brought her nearer to the One Source of comfort and consolation; and now, in returning to the old habit, the troubled clouds had parted, and the star of peace, serene and beautiful, shone down into her heart.

It was like a recovery from a long and wearing sickness; the remembrances of racking pain and

bitter pangs might last through time, but they were no longer poignant ills; the unconscious, involuntary protests of the rebellious will had been the delirium of that fever of the mind through which she had passed, and now came out healthy, if weak.

"Bridget," said Maud, one day, "if Edgeworth had not come back, what should you or I have done?"

"My dear," said the old woman, "do you remember time back, when you were hardly a young lady, and yet more than a child, you must needs work me a book-marker? Mr. Arthur chose the text. I never used it, but I kept it, and the day before Mr. Murray came, and I was turning over my boxes to see what I could best part with, I came upon it."

"I have forgotten; but what was it, Bridget?"

"'In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He will direct thy path.'"

Maud was silent. What better answer could she ask to those anticipations of the future, she had rather put aside than look fairly in the face?

## CHAPTER XL.

"Haste, haste—post haste—across the waste the sleepless
Tartar rides;
The steamboat's prow the sea doth plough, defying winds and
tides;
On iron rails the train-sped mails like fiery meteors dash;
Electric fires, along the wires, their thought-quick tidings flash.

But neither Tartar riding, nor steamboat cleaving sea,
Nor engine's race, devouring space, nor lightning fast and free,
Can match the speed, wherewith at need, hope, fear, and love
combined,
In their strong flight, to the scene of fight, will sweep the
unresting mind.

Almost we curse the skill perverse, that, so far having gone,
To conquer space and time efface, halts ere its work be done;
Leaving half said, what should be read entire, or not at all,
Till hope's hot thrill, and fear's cold chill, like ague on us fall."

*Punch.*

THE event had justified Edgeworth's prognostications. Arthur was not only mentioned in the dispatches of the Commander-in-chief, after the battle of the Alma, but as time went on there came paragraphs in the letters of "our own cor-

respondent," in which Captain Bingley's distinguished services, and Captain Bingley's battery R. H. A. were spoken of in such glowing terms, as filled Maud's heart to overflowing.

Edgeworth, who, strange compound as he was, had his share of family pride, if not of brotherly affection, counted the days between the receipt of the telegraph and the arrival of the news, and was generally pretty right in his auguries from the events of the one, of the incidents of the other. If there was a chance of intelligence from the Crimea, Maud knew there was no hope of seeing him home to dinner till he had conned over all the daily papers, brought by the afternoon express from London.

Any way Edgeworth was prone to lounge away what Bridget called "the dark light" at his Club, and more than once Maud had almost worked herself into a nervous fever, because he had been playing out a rubber, or winning a hard victory at chess.

One dull, cold winter's evening, Edgeworth was later than ever; Maud had been ready dressed for dinner an hour and more, but rather than light candles and see how really late it was, she still sat in the dim firelight, listening to the wind,

which wailed and moaned without like a human creature. She had been weather-bound all day; but Edgeworth, though he had been ailing since yesterday, had gone out late in the afternoon, for he despised precautions, and scouted remonstrances, and Maud thought it was anxiety for him, which made her listen breathless at every unusual sound, and fancy she heard familiar voices through the storm.

A heaviness of spirit, a sense of coming evil was upon her, and, rather than give way to it, she got up and unbarred the window; but there were no stars in the sky, the blast swept pitilessly by, and as she looked out into the night, a sudden yearning came upon her, the unrest of a quiet heart sick of suspense and weary of delay—would that she could fly on the wings of the winds, and unseen—see, unmarked—watch. The entrance-gate opened, and shut; she had just time to close the shutters, draw again the thick, warm curtains, and sink back into her usual seat beside the fire, before she heard Edgeworth enter the house.

He did not halloo to Bridget as usual, but came straight on to their sitting-room. His hand was on the lock, and Maud knew that which she had hardly allowed herself to dread was come.

"There has been an engagement," he began, eagerly.

She did not speak.

"We've got the best of it, of course, but our cavalry have suffered severely; thirteen officers killed, and twenty-one wounded."

An inarticulate sound escaped Maud's lips.

"Arthur's all right, I make no doubt," he went on, "but I should be sorry if anything had happened to Julian; Uncle Murray would be terribly cut up."

He was too excited to care for any answer, and left the room still eager and hurried, to change his dress; but when he came down again there was no Maud.

"Eh! Bridget, where is she? Have you heard the news?" and Edgeworth rehearsed the scanty particulars once more.

The old woman looked concerned.

"Ah! well," she said; "I suppose it's right, but there is such a thing as too much learning, and this flying of messages through the air don't seem altogether natural. When I was young there was fighting enough and to spare, but we hadn't telegraphs to wear a body's heart out with anxiety; if a poor soul was killed or wounded, his friends

knew it at once, though I mind to have heard tell of some great lady, who sat in a back room mourning her dead, while all the street was in a blaze of illuminations, and she hearing the bells ring, and the people cheer."

"She be hung!" said Edgeworth, who was not always choice in his expletives. "The fish is getting cold, and I am waiting."

Bridget made off up-stairs in search of her young lady, with all speed.

"I knew how it would be," she said to herself; "I knew how it would be when I saw how it was in London; 'too much love is luckless,' my mother used to say."

Whatever might have been her attitude before, Maud had risen to her feet by the time Bridget entered the room. She went down, and sat through dinner, and listened to Edgeworth's anticipations of good and evil, and answered, and showed an interest in the conversation when he began to tell her about the boat he was building in the yard below the Cove; "it would be finished before Sebastopol was taken;" and so the evening went by; but there was an ashen hue over the bright complexion, and a tremor in the voice, which Bridget did not like to hear.

"If Mr. Julian's really to marry that fine lady," thought Bridget, to herself, "they'd better have let my poor lamb have her way, and go over the seas. She's given him her whole heart, and that's not easy to take back again. Heaven help her if he is dead! that would be worse still. She'd never face Bankside then; in foreign countries it would be different, new things, and new people, and new ways come like a cloud between us and what is gone before; it won't quite hide it, but it covers it over like, and we begin, as it were, afresh. Yes, I'd never see my young lady's face again, if she goes with Mr. Edgeworth; but better that than watch her pine before my eyes."

Bridget might moralise, but she did not care to speak. She bided her time; but when next day Maud said: "I'm going to walk to Tor, Bridget," she knew what she meant.

Beside her mother's grave heaven seemed nearer, earth and its troubles farther removed.

Edgeworth told his sister she "would lose her good looks if she took such long walks, and stayed out for hours in all weathers;" but he never asked her where she went, and Maud was the better for these pilgrimages; more resigned, more patient, and if not hopeful, more ready to endure whatever

might be laid upon her, and to see only in this what should bear her on to higher thoughts.

The days went by, and a letter came from Mrs. Murray. Maud was, as usual, the recipient of all the irritability her aunt did not dare expend elsewhere.

"We start for England to-morrow," she wrote. "Your uncle fancies we are nearer the Crimea at home than we are here, and all the reasoning in the world does not suffice to convince him to the contrary. For my part, I see no reason to anticipate bad news; it is quite time enough to worry oneself when it comes. The real truth is, Mr. Murray has finished the business which has detained him from day to day, and week to week. He has bought Fintore. When we arrived in Paris, the first thing Lady Louis Crichton told him was that she had written to her man of business to get rid of it at any sacrifice. It is the very thing your uncle has always set his mind on; and though he has not made what I call a good bargain, yet he has satisfied what he calls 'his conscience' by giving more than its actual value. I tried to dissuade him, as the next thing will be to wish me to live there, which I never intend to do. I suppose I may as well tell you that the

engagement between Lady Louis and Julian is entirely broken off. He wrote and called her to account on the score of that foolish business with Herbert, and, as I shall always think, very unwisely entrusted his letter to his uncle. I knew how it would be, if Mr. Murray had anything to do with it. Ada was very angry; she not only acknowledged to an engagement with your brother, but declared that, of the two, she infinitely preferred Herbert. She accused Julian of always having been cold and indifferent towards her, actually tore his letter into pieces in your uncle's very presence, and said she had been only waiting for Julian's return from the Crimea to tell him to his face that she had never cared enough for him to marry him.

"Mr. Murray believes she will recal Herbert, and, if so, you will have her for your sister-in-law after all. I say 'no such thing.' She will never marry unless she gains something in the way of rank or riches to make up for the loss of her independence. I would not, were I in her case. I always liked Ada, and have no quarrel with her now, but Mr. Murray has forbidden me either to call on, or write to her. He saw her himself, however, yesterday, in the presence of their respective

lawyers, when there was a great signing of papers, and no mention of anything else; but I hear she says she 'hopes that at the least it will prove that Julian has lost a leg or an arm, and that she, for one, should think it would do him a great deal of good if he were disfigured for life.' When I know what we are going to do, I will write again. Your uncle is wild with anxiety, now crying like a child, and then all activity again; he would actually wish to be up and off to Balaklava, did not I tell him, if Julian is wounded he is sure to be sent on board ship, and if—though I dare not say that—the worst has happened, he would only have his trip across Europe for nothing, and be miserable out there all by himself."

And Mrs. Murray took a third sheet of foreign post expressly to say she had bought six bonnets, and as many dresses, and that among the former there was a pink one she did not like, which she thought she should give to Maud, and concluded by the remark "that she hoped, at any rate, Julian would get leave of absence and come home, as she by no means wished to run any risk about mourning."

As a sort of penance for having so long kept back the truth, Maud showed Edgeworth this letter.

"I thought how it would be," he said, carelessly; "I did not walk and talk a whole hour with old Murray for nothing. He let me into Julian's secret before it came to the turn of our plans, Maud. What a nice fix he would have been in if Lady Louis had held fast to her bargain!" And at this idea Edgeworth could not restrain his merriment.

Maud saw nothing to laugh at, and her brother checked himself at the sight of her distressed face.

"It's a shame to chaff at such a time," he said, "for I shan't soon forget going over the field after the battle of the Alma. If Julian is wounded, he's got enough to go through."

Edgeworth invariably talked of Julian as "wounded," and by degrees, abandoning her own fears, Maud came to partake of his hope; so much so, that it did not come upon her like a blow when the letter at last arrived from Arthur, which told that Julian had been a sufferer in the cavalry charge at Balaklava. He had been one of the devoted band whose heroic bravery has since become matter of history, one of the few who came back alive from that mad gallop, which men may justly call the glory and shame of England.

Arthur made no mention of that since "vexed

question." He wrote from the bed-side of the wounded man. Julian's left arm had been so severely shattered, that amputation had been necessary. He had lost all power over his horse, but the good bay, he had ridden many a year, had brought his master out of action, when he was faint and bleeding from no less than six lance wounds. These, though ghastly to look at, were more painful than dangerous; even the arm was not so bad a business as might have been; but the worst part of it was that Julian had been suffering, and was still suffering from an attack on his chest; he had left his bed that morning to go into action, and the surgeon of his regiment said the sooner he could be got out of the temporary hospital, and shipped off for England, the better.

## CHAPTER XLI.

"If I should loose thy hand, and know
That henceforth we must dwell apart,
If I should gaze and gaze in vain
Into thy eyes so deep and clear,
And read the truth of half my fear
Half-mixed with pity for my pain,
And sorrow for the vanished year.
The ghost of my dead past would rise
And mock me. * *
All truth, all honour then would seem
Vain clouds, which the first wind blew by;
All life, a useless empty dream;
All love—since thine had failed—a lie."

ADELAIDE PROCTER.

THE weeks of suspense that followed on this dread certainty were an ordeal, which it was hard for Mr. Murray to go through; but with all their tedious length, they were scarce as intolerable as the three days at Portsmouth, when the great three-decker, on board of which was Julian, lay in the offing.

It was well Edgeworth had accompanied him; for though Mr. Murray had secured the best rooms at the "George," and could keep landlord, waiters, chambermaids, and boots alike in a state of perpetual commotion, he could not move the hard hearts of official personages, and dockyard dignitaries, and for the first time in a long life he felt the want of human sympathy and counsel.

It was cold, miserable work, waiting on the harbour piers; but when the steam-tug, after long buffeting with adverse wind and tide, brought that dark, dismal hull so near, that the dim, white tarpaulins covering the dying—perhaps the dead—were plainly visible, Mr. Murray, who had been waiting since break of day, could bear it no longer, but, retreating behind some friendly seamen, hid his face in his hands. He could not endure that sad and solemn spectacle.

Edgeworth went in search of him.

"Those are the worst cases; those are the poor fellows they never dared carry below; they'll bring them on shore first."

And by degrees he persuaded Mr. Murray to come back to his station at the head of the narrow gangway, across which the sick men were borne from sea to land. No nearer approach was per-

mitted. He had half-crowns and half-sovereigns for all those occupants of the canvas cots, who had strength to stretch out a hand to take it. Such was Mr. Murray's thank-offering; but he trembled and groaned when by chance from under a great heap of blankets, he caught sight of an ashy white, thin face, looking all the more ghastly for the long moustache and military cap, still worn as bed-gear.

It was a long and tedious business, but at last Edgeworth said:—

"We must look out now, they are beginning to bring up the less dangerous cases from between decks. You'll see, they'll transfer this lot from their cots to litters."

It was as he said. The men were carried up, each dressed in his great-coat, and with his knapsack laid beside him; and Mr. Murray recognized the uniform of many a private of Julian's regiment; these got the golden guerdons, and could salute him in return, though they had hardly strength to speak. He did not know who it was, though, who almost at the last was brought up from the fore-part of the vessel, though Paton, or rather the skeleton of Paton, walked at his master's head.

Beneath a pile of bedclothes, Edgeworth caught sight of a familiar face, a face all hair and eyes, and so eager, wan, and wistful in its expression, that even he could not speak, but almost with reverence took the hand, which was but skin and bone, and which he almost feared to crush in his strong, nervous clasp. It had been a deadly struggle for the last six weeks between life and death, and to unaccustomed eyes the contest seemed about to close.

A few broken exclamations from Mr. Murray, and Julian—the bearers of whose cot stood still—hid his face beneath his coverings, while Paton, who, in the last six months, had seen worse sights, and suffered such misery and want, as he had never dreamed of, without a murmur, burst out crying like a child. He was gaunt and threadbare, and Percival would hardly have recognized the gentleman's gentleman, she thought so very "stylish;" but he had brought his master back alive, which, as he said when he reached the hotel, he "never thought to do;" and his heart was so full, he could not utter a word, still less make the set speech he had conned over since the day of the great horse charge, when, as he expressed it, "the Captain rode straight at the big battery."

Great tears were rolling down Mr. Murray's cheeks, but he did not heed them; and when the bearers took up their burden, he started in such haste, that Edgeworth did not attempt to keep up, and by the time they reached the hotel was quite cheerful, and able to make much more commotion about Julian's being carried up-stairs than was either pleasant or desirable.

As they bore him into the great, dim sitting-room, Julian raised himself on his elbow, and looked eagerly round.

"What is it?" said Edgeworth. "What do you want? anything I can get?"

"Nothing, thank you," and he sank back again on his pillow with a sigh, which was almost a groan.

Mr. Murray began to talk of Fintore as a cheerful subject, and Julian tried to answer, but his low, feeble tones scarce reached Mr. Murray's ears, and his first words were cut short by a fit of coughing, and when that was over he closed his eyes with an expression of weariness and dejection, which even struck his uncle.

He rang for wine, he ordered soup, he begged for dinner, he even talked of tea, but at every proposition Julian shook his head.

"It's no go," said Edgeworth, at last; "the place for you is a good English bed;" and having a tolerably strong will of his own, he carried his point, and not only reigned supreme on that occasion, but so long as he remained on what he called "duty."

Anybody else would have hesitated about contradicting Mr. Murray in his desire to be always with his nephew, but Edgeworth had no such scruples. He only admitted his uncle to Julian's room on sufferance; he forbade all exciting topics, and he positively prohibited creaking boots and restless movements. Mr. Murray might read the newspaper and write his letters in the sick room, but he was not to bring there the bustle of arrangements, or enter into any discussions whatever.

Julian was so utterly prostrate, as hardly to heed the lagging lapse of time. The only wish he ever expressed was to find himself at Bankside, and even that was rescinded as soon as uttered.

"All places are the same to me," he said to Edgeworth; "if my uncle wishes me to go to London, be it so."

The next time he spoke, he recurred to his first idea.

"When I was in hospital on the Heights," he said, "I used to think I should not care for pain if only I were back in my old room at Bankside. And in all that frost and snow, I dreamt night after night that there I was, and it was all just as it used to be when I was ill before, summer weather and the blinds all down to keep out the sun, and just light enough for me to see who sat there. It was always the same thing; I suppose I woke directly I tried to speak or move, for no good ever came of it, save the momentary pleasure;" and Julian turned his face away and sighed, as he generally did if anybody spoke of the future, or talked to him of recovery.

So soon as it was possible, the move to London was effected. Mr. White came up from Windsor; but Mr. Murray could not rest satisfied without the verdict of a great London surgeon, as well as of another physician. He was not forbidden to hope, but it was agreed on all sides there was much room for fear; youth and a good constitution were in his favour, everything else was against him; and Captain Murray was told he must give up all thoughts of rejoining his regiment, or going again on active service. Mild air, generous diet, and great care were absolutely necessary; the

doubt was whether, under the most favourable circumstances, he could face the cold winds of an English spring with impunity.

His abject state of debility rendered a long journey alike undesirable and inexpedient; and Julian, who was rallying his strength to protest against another expatriation on the score of climate, always gave Mr. White the credit of having been the first to mention Torquay.

This suggestion gave Mr. Murray infinite satisfaction, which was more than could be said for his wife, who was beginning to count upon a spring in London, and it required all Julian's influence to bring her to consent to a transfer of the establishment from Bankside to Devonshire. He carried his point at last; even Mrs. Murray found it difficult to disappoint any one so ill, and Edgeworth was commissioned to look out for a house; and when he had hurried him off, Captain Murray was dreadfully disappointed to find he was not to be allowed to follow, until he could at the least walk from one room to another.

That he should wish to do so, that this prospect should have power to rouse him from the state of passive acquiescence, in which suffering had left him sunk, was considered a great point in his

favour, and Mr. White chuckled and rubbed his hands with glee, when, on his second visit, not many days after, he found Julian was only waiting for his sanction to leave his bed.

"If Torquay does as much for you as I expect," was, from that time forth, the phrase perpetually in the good old man's mouth.

Whatever the moving cause, by the time Edgeworth had pleased himself in the matter of a house, Julian was able to travel; and though Maud would not go to meet them, her brother was ready and waiting at the Torquay station to assist Julian when the four o'clock express came in. But for once in her life Maud was wilful. She would not go to the station, no, nor even put on her bonnet till from the windows she saw the carriage drive down the hill into Hesketh Crescent, and actually stop before the door.

Indeed, she so managed to time her visit of welcome, that Julian was gone to his own room, and Mrs. Murray only in the drawing-room.

"To look at you, Maud, one would think this was a particularly healthy place, instead, as I hear, of being full of invalids," was one of that lady's earliest observations, "or have you taken to rouge?"

Maud rebutted this last accusation, and, by way

of a plea in favour of the place she loved, propounded the fact that Lady Newdigate, who was never ill, was living on the hill above. "She had built herself a house, and meant to make it her head-quarters."

"I suppose she does not notice you," pleasantly remarked her aunt.

"Edgeworth and I dine there to-night," began Maud.

"Dine! where?" echoed Mr. Murray, who entered at this moment. "You and your brother dine here every day, of course; I can't think why you have not moved into this house, it would be much more agreeable to be all together."

"Maud likes her independence," said his wife, "and in proof of it she dines with Lady Newdigate the day of our arrival."

Maud explained that the invitation had been given and accepted quite ten days before; and Mr. Murray, excited as he was, listened, which was more than could be said for her aunt, who, when she came up alone from dinner, and, rather to her surprise, found Julian established on the drawing-room sofa, edified him with her version of the affair, besides giving him a whole history of the visit to Middlemore, and all the subsequent events.

When Maud, next morning, paid as early a visit to the Crescent as was consistent with the habits of the house, she was told Julian had passed a very restless night; but she did not see him, for directly after luncheon Mrs. Murray carried her off up-stairs to inspect her Paris finery, and though Paton told her, as she left the house, that "the Captain and Mr. Edgeworth were walking in the gardens," she did not take the hint, or go in search of them.

Bridget had laid out the pretty dress her young mistress had worn at Lady Newdigate's, but Miss Bingley said "it was too good to walk across to dinner in," and asked for an inexpensive white muslin; but, for all that, she arranged her hair after the fashion that became her best, and Bridget, watching unobserved, saw the plaits taken down more than once before they satisfied the fastidious eye of their owner.

Twilight and firelight but faintly illumined the drawing-room in the Crescent, when Edgeworth and his sister were ushered in, and Maud might have spared herself all tremours, for only Mr. and Mrs. Murray sat in solemn silence on each side of the fire. The former had a smile for Maud; but evidently things were not going exactly as he wished, for he said not a word till dinner was

announced, and then he turned to the man with, "Where is Captain Murray?"

His wife answered:—

"I don't suppose Julian will dine, for after his walk he sat idling here so long, that he went to his room quite tired."

Mr. Murray grunted, and held out his arm to the visitor.

As she rose, a dark, hairy mass came bounding into the room, and rushed full tilt against Maud, with obstreperous demonstrations of rejoicing.

"Why, Rusty, I had forgotten even to ask after you."

Rusty's master stood the other side of the open door, and extended his hand as she passed out.

"How do you do, Maud?"

"I hope you are better, Julian," and the dreaded meeting was over.

Luckily Edgeworth was in a talking humour, which was not invariably the case, or the dinner would have gone off but silently. Maud sat on Mr. Murray's right hand, and Julian on her aunt's left; she did not, therefore, command a full view of his face, but the object that did attract her notice, though she could hardly bear to see it, was the empty coat-sleeve by his side.

Their looks had met once and only for a minute,

and Julian had turned quickly away with an expression of disappointment and pain, of shame and mortification, which had never been there before. His old familiar ease was gone, he scarcely spoke, but there was not more change in his bearing towards her, than in his handsome face and stalwart form.

Maud had known all along that it would be different; but she had thought it would be easy after the first to fall back upon friendship, since Julian had no share in the delusive dream she had secretly cherished. That there could be any change in him, it remained for her to realize, as she sat once more beside him, and read the altered expression of his averted eyes.

White, worn, and haggard, Julian was but the shadow of his former self; his very clothes were a world too wide for his shrunken form, while the dejected, spiritless aspect, and the thoughtful cast of countenance, which had replaced his former joyous, frank, fearless look, corroborated only too well Arthur's sorrowful details of the ordinary effects of the sickness, privation, and misery, of which Julian, before he left the camp, had experienced his full share.

Maud's heart swelled within her. Hers was

not a resentful nature, and at that moment her bitterest pang was that it was not for her, as in past times, to tend, to comfort, and console.

The fish and soup were removed, and Rusty came, as had been his wont more than a year before, with upraised paws to ask for bread. The very dog looked at her with tender, pitying eyes, and though Maud did not speak, he understood her answering glance and gesture, and laid his rough head upon her lap.

"Down, Rusty," said Julian, "you are too pertinacious;" and, used to the subdued, quiet tone in which he spoke, the poor animal crept to his master's feet once more.

Maud felt her seemingly ungracious speech had deserved the reproach these words implied, but this conviction did not make her more happy, or less constrained.

Julian had not addressed her, nor did he till the dessert was on the table; he upset a dish, and then he turned apologetically towards her.

"I'm not out of my apprenticeship, you see, but in time, they tell me, my one hand will do the work of two."

He tried to speak lightly, but it was so evident an effort, that Maud's eyes filled with tears.

"How sensitive Julian is on the score of his arm," said Mrs. Murray, when the two ladies reached the drawing-room. "I really believe he was purposely late for dinner to-day because he had not seen you before."

"He looks very ill," said Maud, sadly.

"I am sure he was better in London," returned her aunt. "There he was more cheerful, at any rate. I remarked the change yesterday, and to-day, certainly, he is more depressed than ever. I really should not wonder if, after all, he was worrying himself about Ada Crichton."

Maud made no answer, and none was needed, for, at that moment, the subject of their discourse entered the room, closely followed by Edgeworth, who had, in the course of the last four-and-twenty hours, coolly resumed all authority as sick nurse, and spent far more time in the Crescent, and in Julian's company, than he did with his sister.

"Mr. Murray wants us to migrate from over the way, Maud, but I say 'No,'" were his first words.

Maud fancied Julian looked at her, but she turned to Mrs. Murray.

"I really do not think there is room for us, Aunt Sophia," she said, appealingly.

"Benham is the best person to consult on the subject," was the cool rejoinder.

"We are very well were we are," reiterated Edgeworth.

"I saw Lady Newdigate's carriage at your door this afternoon," remarked her aunt to Maud. "She will hardly come here to look for you; she has no particular affection for me."

Julian, who had been standing on the hearth-rug, doubtful whether to go or stay, at these words walked off into the second drawing-room, which was appropriated to him as a sitting-room, but he left the door half open.

"She likes Maud's singing, but I doubt whether she cares much about herself," observed Edgeworth, who had a very tolerable idea what Mrs. Murray was driving at.

"By the way, Maud," chimed in her uncle, "there is a piano here, let me hear whether you have lost your voice for want of practice."

It was easier to her this evening to sing than to talk, and Mr. Murray was not content till he had heard one after another of his old favourites. Edgeworth, as it happened, was particularly proud of his sister's musical talents; he would listen to her with the greatest attention, and it was he, not

she, who was offended if anybody ventured to speak during the performance. Maud's memory was good, but Edgeworth's was better, and this evening he found ample occupation in prompting her as to the endless verses of the Scotch ballads Mr. Murray loved. But, all of a sudden, he remembered his patient in the next room, and on the instant deserted his post at the piano.

Julian was lying on the sofa, his one hand clasped above his head, but he did not turn his face to Edgeworth when he entered.

"I say, old fellow, shall I stop this?" said the latter, who had some experience himself in the matter of nerves.

Julian shook his head with a very decided gesture, but he did not move, and in the outer room they soon heard Mr. Murray ask for "Excelsior;" and then, rather to his companion's surprise, Julian rose from his recumbent position, and paced to and fro the room. When the last strains died away, he advanced towards the piano.

Maud, who was closing it, did not immediately perceive him.

"Good-night," said Mr. Murray to the audience generally. "It's time for you to be in bed, Julian."

"I am going," was the answer, and he came

up close to where she stood, and held out his hand. "Good-night, Maud."

She blushed, she could not help it, for his look pertinaciously sought hers.

"You sang that song on an ever-to-be-remembered evening at Bankside," he remarked.

"Before your accident," she answered.

He bent his head.

"I should be grieved indeed if for you it were ever less than true," said he, as he released the hand he yet held.

Maud did not understand his meaning, any more than she had comprehended his manner in the early part of the evening.

Edgeworth was not content to depart till he had convoyed his charge up to bed; Mrs. Murray was fast asleep on the sofa, and would not stir before eleven; so his sister was left to sit over the drawing-room fire, and to debate within herself whether to be thus thrown into the society of Julian, and to feel that the friendly familiarity of old times was now for her no longer, were not rather a pain than a pleasure.

If Julian carried the same feeling with him to his bed, she was none the wiser; the flushed face, the feverish accents, the sort of reproach with

which he spoke, were, each and all, enigmas she found it hard to read.

Even Edgeworth did not understand the impatience, which dismissed Paton before he had completed half the preparations he deemed essential to his sick master's comfort, but, Paton gone, Julian spoke.

"Do you give your consent to your sister's marriage?" he asked.

"What!" ejaculated Edgeworth, for once taken by surprise.

The next minute he recovered himself.

"I did not know she had given her own."

"Mrs. Murray—" began Julian.

"Better say Lady Newdigate at once," sneered Edgeworth. "For my part," he continued, more placably, "I wish Kennedy himself would come as she threatens, I should like to see the fellow."

"I don't doubt you will have your wish."

"In that case, Mrs. Murray, Lady Newdigate, and Colonel Kennedy are safe to share the fate tradition assigns to the Kilkenny cats," and Edgeworth was actually moved to mirth at his own witticism.

But to Julian it was no laughing matter.

"Such constancy must tell on your sister,"

he persisted, "though his consistency is another thing," he added, bitterly, as his thoughts recurred to all Colonel Kennedy's arguments, written as well as spoken.

Edgeworth yawned, but Julian had enough energy left to raise himself eagerly on his elbow.

"He did mean it, he must have meant it from the first; he as good as told her before my face on Ascot Racecourse, that if he got his money a pretty wife would follow."

"He be hung!" said Edgeworth, lazily. "Rather than marry him, Maud had made up her mind to go out to India."

## CHAPTER XLII.

> "But see, thy tender smile has cast
> My fear away; this thought of mine
> Is treason to my love and thine;
> For love is life, and death at last
> Crowns it eternal and divine."
>
> ADELAIDE PROCTER.

> "Then they laid his head, where it loved to rest,
> In the hollow of his shield. * *
>
> * * * * *
>
> They are plain to read, those records."—A.

ON Sunday morning Maud was surprised to see Mr. Murray walk in, just as she was setting out for church alone, for it was not always that Edgeworth's indolent habits allowed of his being dressed in time. He regularly went with her once a day, and though he had been defiant on the subject as a boy, he had come to be apologetic since; so much so, that his sister did not despair of, at some future time, principle gaining a complete victory, and conviction and conscience getting the mastery.

"I thought I'd walk to church with you, Maud," said Mr. Murray, uneasily. "Julian is waiting for his aunt; they drive."

Maud was so utterly astonished, all this was so contrary to the habits of the family, that she had no remark to make, and Mr. Murray went on a little hurriedly.

"When Julian was in London, we settled it between us. I can't bring the church nearer at Bankside, but henceforth, Maud, you will not be the only one to go."

"Dear Uncle Murray! I am so glad." It was all she could find voice to say.

"Julian says it has been a positive reproach to us; but, as I tell him, it has been rather an example, and an example, Maud, I, for one, am not ashamed to follow."

But Maud was not so ready to take credit to herself as Mr. Murray was to accord it to her. Disease and danger are such teachers, she knew, as man may not disregard, and Julian had not only suffered much himself, but witnessed more in others, during the course of the last six months. Of the regiment of which he had been so proud, scarce even a fragment remained; officers and men had alike been sacrificed in one grand holocaust,

and those whom the bullet and the sword had spared, had since rendered up their lives to the yet more terrible onset of pestilence and famine.

Sir George Vanston had been last seen cheering his men on, in front of the Russian guns. Mr. Grey's name was already roughly carved on a stone cross, which marks each narrow mound of earth, borrowed for the Christian from the Infidel, in the since deserted burial-ground at Scutari.

If Julian were grown grave, Maud did not marvel, and she would fain school herself to bear the variations in his manner, for though reserve was the rule rather than the exception, he did every now and then warm up into his old self. They rarely met except at dinner-time, and Maud felt it was better that it should be so. It is hard to unlove, and she was schooling herself for the time—which Mr. Murray was ever wishing to antedate—when they should be again living beneath the same roof, and she should have to go through with the daily, hourly intercourse, their relative positions demanded.

Weeks rolled by; Julian grew stronger, and that was the only change. A day seldom passed that Mr. Murray did not pay Maud a visit; even Mrs. Murray liked to idle away a spare hour, every now

and then, in her pretty, cheerful sitting-room; but Julian had never come further than the garden, and Maud thought her ears must have played her false, when, one afternoon, she heard his voice in the vestibule, inquiring "if Miss Bingley was at home."

Half-an-hour before she had seen Lady Newdigate's carriage in the Crescent, for, to Mrs. Murray's no small gratification, the dowager countess had evinced a taste for Crimean heroes, even above that she testified for what Edgeworth called "a singing damsel." But there was no time for speculation, Julian walked in unannounced, though Bridget closed the door behind him, and Maud looked up in astonishment.

Since his return she had not seen his face wear so free and happy a look, as that which now smiled on her.

"Maud," he began, "I bring tidings."

Her thoughts flew to the Crimea, and the blood deserted the cheeks, to which it had but the moment before mounted.

"After all," he said, "I do not suppose you will care," and he was relapsing so fast into his ordinary mood, that Maud almost expected to see him turn and leave the room.

"It's hardly fair to excite my curiosity, and

then to leave it ungratified," returned she, "and you must sit down and make yourself comfortable. Edgeworth has left me strict orders to finish mending this landing-net before he comes in."

She was determined for once to meet him half way.

He, too, made an effort.

"Lady Louis Crichton and Colonel Kennedy are actually married!"

"Married," she re-echoed. "I can't believe it."

"Old Lady Newdigate has just announced it," he went on; "and Mrs. Murray broke it to me so cautiously, that I am fain to believe I am expected to be overwhelmed with despair."

"I am so glad," ejaculated Maud.

"Poor Kennedy!" and it was the same Julian, both in look and tone, who had been wont in bygone days to make sport of her aversion to the gallant guardsman.

Maud was silent. The first surprise over, and it did strike her as a little inconsistent that her companion showed no signs of perturbation or distress. Mrs. Murray had given her quite another impression of the state of his feelings. She looked up at him to see how it could be, and met his eyes riveted upon her face, with an earnestness, which sent her back to her netting with redoubled industry.

"Maud," he said, more gravely, "I don't presume to comment on your actions; I only wish I were as free from blame."

"I do not see that Lady Louis Crichton has any right to feel aggrieved," said Maud, without raising her face.

"Lady Louis," he repeated; "Lady Louis has married a man, who will suit her far better than I should have done. Besides, if he does not, she will appreciate a place in the country, a house in town, and all the addenda of twelve thousand a-year. They will make up to her for the want of anything else. Depend on it, Ada Crichton is perfectly satisfied. The person I pity is Kennedy."

Maud reddened, but Julian went on hurriedly:—

"I ought to feel for him, if anybody does; I did exactly the same, and with even less excuse. Kennedy has had a great disappointment, a bitter mortification to endure, and it was enough to drive him into that, which he will repent his whole life long."

"I hope not," was all Maud could find to say.

"My punishment began directly," continued Julian, with an agitation that was contagious. "I had only my own folly to thank for it; but I can truly say, that, from that time to this, I have

never known an hour's real happiness, or a moment's peace of mind."

He got up and walked restlessly to the window and back again.

"And, in an hour of infatuation and excitement, I sacrificed what I shall never have the conscience to ask for back again," added he, in a suppressed tone.

He waited for a reply, but Maud could neither speak nor look up; her hands trembled so, that she could hardly hold her work, and there were false stitches in Edgeworth's landing-net, to bear testimony against her for ever after.

Julian stood close to her, leaning his elbow on the mantel-shelf, and Maud could hear his quickened respiration, though she could not see the face, which glowed with the mingled emotions of love and hope, of disappointment and of reproach.

There was a long pause, and then, in an altered tone, Julian said:—

"Maud, why did you never tell me Herbert was engaged to Ada Crichton?"

"It was hardly an engagement; besides, I was strictly charged never to say a word about it at Bankside?"

"But at Ryde, at Ryde, when it was broken

off, it would have been no treachery to have told why Herbert left England so abruptly."

She remained silent, and Julian began to pace up and down the room. At last he came up to her again.

"I give you my word of honour," he said, nervously, "that at that time the idea of marrying Lady Louis Crichton had never crossed my brain. It had been a question mooted in the family, it had been an old project, which had no better foundation than the boyish admiration I had once felt for her; but I tell you, Maud, and you must believe me, that I had other hopes then."

Unconscious passion trembled in his voice; almost imperiously he demanded a reply.

"Maud, do you believe me?"

"Yes," she said, in a voice of forced composure; "I am sure you speak the truth, as far, at least, as you yourself are concerned."

He never guessed that it was to Ada Crichton that she referred; on the contrary, he understood her as rebutting any suspicion of her own feelings having been concerned.

"I may have deceived myself," he rejoined, sadly, and his tone grew sadder as he spoke; "you know best whether I did. I may have deceived

myself," he repeated, "in the same spirit of egregious vanity as that which, later, led me to believe that Ada Crichton was going to give up the habits of a lifetime for my sake."

A sickening sense of disappointment crept over Maud's heart, and it was in a half bitter, half desponding tone, that she said:—

"I am the last person to doubt Lady Louis Crichton's powers of fascination."

"I don't pretend to exonerate myself," continued Julian, with all the vehemence of one who at last allows himself to speak, "but I do say this, I never contemplated an engagement, I never said a word of marriage till I found I had gone so far, I could not honourably retreat."

A burning glow, as he said these words, overspread his features; it was not the light blush of boy or girl, called up by fond or idle words, but a flush which sprang from the far deeper feeling of shame, repentance, and mortification, and in a lower voice he continued:—

"Maud, do you remember our speaking on this very subject, in the early days of our acquaintance, so long ago as that memorable Ascot, when I first lost, what I have never wished, and never shall wish to call my own again?"

"For the sake of those days," continued Julian, goaded by her quiet manner into saying more than he had intended, "if for nothing else, listen to me. I know I trifled with Ada Crichton at Rome, I confess that I had not even the poor excuse of fancying myself in earnest, and yet by the time the winter was ended I was behaving in a manner, which nothing else could justify. I was always at her house, I was ever by her side, and, mad fool that I was, weak enough to be flattered by the preference I thought she felt for me, and proud, or rather vain, of being distinguished above all other competitors for her notice. I never loved her, never esteemed her, never thought of her as the wife, who was to be the joy and blessing of my life. I was false to her, faithless to myself, untrue to all the better, higher, and nobler aspirations, which were not dead, but sleeping in the innermost sanctuary of my heart."

There was pain, there was pleasure in Maud's face while he thus spoke; it was sweet, it was bitter to listen to these open reproaches of himself, and implied value for what she had begun to think he had never cared, but she could not bear to hear him accuse himself.

"But why recal this?" she said, softly. "No

one single person believes that any blame attaches to you."

"The more reason I should condemn myself," rejoined Julian, quickly. "Nothing could excuse Ada's behaviour to Herbert, I know; and the one only cause of complaint I have against her is the deception, which, when I spoke of him to her, she did not scruple to practise upon me. But I cannot blame her, my conduct towards her admitted of no more palliation than did hers to Herbert. The only one right thing I did was that, for which I am aware others may think I am most open to reproach."

Maud looked up inquiringly. Her own love was at the moment swallowed up and forgotten in her entire sympathy with Julian's open and palpable distress; but Captain Murray's confession applied to himself rather than to others, and he did not go on as Maud could have wished. He would have found it hard entirely to exculpate himself without inculpating Lady Louis Crichton; and he could not, even into Maud's ears, pour the history of the excited feelings, the passionate outbreak, the well-simulated grief, which marked the hour of his departure, and had been the culminating point of Lady Louis Crichton's long-laid schemes.

"Maud," he said, at last, and lowering his voice to such a tender intensity of passion, that she trembled and shivered before him; "Maud," he repeated, "after all this you will hardly believe that I can love faithfully, cherish fondly, treasure tenderly; you will think that I am too self-confident, too presumptuous—"

The window at the further end of the room was thrown up from the outside, and Edgeworth, in fishermen's boots and sea-stained garments, stepped in.

"I say, Maud, what a fire! it's almost out, and here am I wet to the skin, and Julian looking as if he had seen a ghost."

Edgeworth's passion for molluscæ had a prior claim upon him, and all the treasures he brought with him were to be arranged and sorted before he would hear of changing his dripping garments, while Julian and Maud were alike rated for being clumsy and cool in the assistance they afforded him.

It was hardly to be wondered at, therefore, that next day he was hoarse and feverish; but he still wanted to get up, and kept Maud so long waiting while he was demurring and debating, whether he should or should not venture to church, that she

was not ready when Mr. Murray called for her, and service had begun before, with all the haste she could make, she reached St. John's.

Maud sat in the same corner which she had occupied for years, but the Murrays had a whole pew up-stairs in the gallery; and when the sermon ended, Maud could hear Mr. Murray's creaking boots, and Mrs. Murray's rustling sweep, as they, each after their own fashion, noisily left the church.

It was Easter Sunday, and if, when the feast in its fullest sense was held, Maud breathed one prayer more fervent than the rest, it was that, ere the year came round, she might not kneel alone, but that others might with her bend the knee, and share the blessings, which at that table are so freely poured.

She waited to come out till the last. The little house, which Edgeworth so contemned, was but a few paces distant, and she wanted to look at the home, where her mother's last days on earth had been spent—to gaze again at the window, where Arthur had sat hour after hour that Easter Sunday, two years ago, when the very fact of his presence was all the comfort she could take.

As she turned back, she saw Julian hurrying from one church-door to the other, and as he came out the second time he met her.

"Why, Maud, I thought I had missed you altogether. My uncle wanted to send back the carriage, but I had promised myself the walk with you."

"I think it would be wiser if you condescended to a donkey-chair," said Maud. "It is a long walk."

"All the better," was the dry response, for if her words enjoined prudence, her looks encouraged perseverance. "We can take our time."

And so they did, and as they moved slowly on, their talk was peaceful, calm, and happy. At the top of Silver Hill, Julian paused and looked back.

"This view puts me in mind of the hills about Sebastopol, but the bay lacks the narrow entrance and steep wall of rocks."

"It will be a year to-morrow since Arthur went," said Maud, softly; "the Sunday before Easter was his last day in England."

"He is here to-day," said Julian, with a positiveness that Maud afterwards deemed prophetic, "at least in thought."

There was a silence, and then Julian spoke again.

"Maud, I must tell you that I saw more of Arthur after I was wounded, and learned to know him better, in those few weeks, than I did in all the months that passed before; and it was by his

persuasions—though I told him how, when I had resolved to lead a new life before, I had most miserably failed—that I first made up my mind 'to draw near in faith.'"

"'It is for the strengthening and refreshing of our souls,'" said she, seriously.

"This is not the first time," continued Julian; "Arthur brought one of the chaplains to my bedside when I was at the worst, and he said what I have heard many fellows, who used to be careless, confirm, 'that Arthur's consistent life does more real good than all the preaching in the world.' He lives as we shall all wish to have done, when we come to die."

As they gained the summit of the hill, Mr. Murray was seen ascending on the other side, and as he approached, Julian added:—

"When my uncle has once made up his mind, Maud, there will be no wavering or looking back on his part."

He had come to meet them; possibly he regretted he had not been with them; but Mr. Murray was a man of few words, and, though he turned with Julian and Maud, he hardly uttered a syllable as they all walked on together.

At the bottom of the hill, Maud said "good-by," and then her uncle spoke.

"And so you are not coming to dinner to-night," he said, in a disappointed voice. "Edgeworth tells me he shan't go out to-day, and he seems to think he can't spare you."

"He never can bear staying at home by himself," pleaded Maud.

Julian was as courteous as any gentleman of the old school, so Maud was not surprised when he came after her to hold the gate open.

"One word, Maud; I want to know if I am buoying myself up with false hopes," he said, in a low tone.

His deep blue eyes had a meaning in them, which overpowered Maud; she could only hold out her hand.

"Am I pardoned?" he would have an answer.

"Yesterday I should have said, 'if you will be what you were before;' to-day I cannot wish for anything but what is;" and Maud hurried away for fear Julian should read in her face the happiness she found it very difficult to conceal.

Edgeworth stayed at home that evening, and many a one after, and certainly Julian returned in kind all the visits this very whimsical invalid had previously bestowed on him. He asked for nothing better than to sit hour after hour with the brother

and sister; so much so, that Mrs. Murray, who was beginning to tire of the sea and to think about her garden, proposed to her spouse to go home and leave Julian with the Bingleys.

"They will go to Bankside when we do, Mrs. Murray," was the answer.

"And pray, may I ask when that will be?" she retorted.

"When Julian has attained that which he came here to seek," was Mr. Murray's unhesitating response.

Edgeworth was very fanciful, and on the most beautiful spring days he would stay in bed to nurse his rheumatic pains, nor choose to leave his room till the house was shut up in the evening, and on these occasions it was useless for Julian to beg Maud to walk, or for Mrs. Murray to invite her to accompany her in the carriage; she must stay with her brother.

"Maud," said this despotic being, late one afternoon, "it's about time for news from the Crimea, we have had the telegraph in a week and more. Put on your bonnet, there's a good girl, and run down to the Crescent; if you can't do old Murray out of the *Times*, you can see if there is anything in it, or if Arthur is mentioned, and bring me word."

His sister obeyed, and, sure enough, found her uncle walking up and down before the door, waiting for the messenger who brought the day's paper.

"Come in, Maud," he said, when, punctual to the minute, the man appeared, "come in and read me what they say. They print their Crimean correspondence too small."

They went into the dining-room, and while Mr. Murray settled himself in his arm-chair, Maud spread the paper wide open upon the table.

"Here it is!" and she began eagerly to read; "here it is, dated April 14th."

The letter opened with some half-dozen lines, to the effect that the weather, hitherto wet, was at present serene enough, and Maud read straight on without one misgiving, through a paragraph, which ran thus:—

"The enemy, who had slackened fire for some days previously, opened on Easter Sunday from some earth-works, which had been pushed on towards our outposts, and the service, I regret to say, sustained a severe loss in Captain Arthur Bingley, R. H. A. who was on that day on volunteer duty in the trenches. A chance bullet struck him in the cheek, and lodged in the back of the throat. Surgical assistance was obtained almost immedi-

ately, but all in vain; he sank rapidly through loss of blood, and died before the Sabbath sun had set."

"Died! he's not dead, it can't be!" exclaimed Mr. Murray, rising from his chair.

Maud stood still, a quiet, silent statue; she uttered no cry, shed not one single tear, the very power of speech had departed.

The tramp of Julian's horse was heard before the door, and, as he slowly alighted, a white, wan spectre flew past him.

"Maud, Maud," he cried, but she did not stay her step, nor heed his extended hand.

Mr. Murray, bare-headed, his whole face working with agitation, caught his nephew's arm, and in no very coherent phrase blurted out the truth. Julian only stayed to master the particulars, before he hurried after Maud.

Through the open door, as he entered the house, he saw her standing at the window of the sitting-room, her bonnet and cloak flung upon the floor.

"Maud," he said, but she did not answer or turn her head.

He put his arm around her, he held her fast, he gathered her to his heart, he kissed her many a time.

"Maud, Maud, what can I do to comfort you?"

Great tears were rolling down his own cheeks as he spoke, but her eyes were dry. Maud trembled violently; there was no tinge of colour even in her lips; she tried to speak, but no words followed on the effort. Julian was frightened.

"Maud," he reiterated, in a broken voice, "it is our loss, but his gain. And on what better day could Arthur rise from earth to heaven? And Maud, dear Maud," he went on, after a pause, "he did not die in all the din and tumult, the mad excitement and fiery whirl of battle, but quietly and calmly doing his duty—helping others to do their duty. It was just like him, to volunteer."

He had touched the right chord at last.

"I know, I know," she faltered, but she could say no more; and, laying her head involuntarily on the loving heart, which made her grief his own, she burst forth into sobs and convulsive gasps.

Julian led her to the sofa, and, with both her hands in his, told her what she hitherto had not known. Arthur had wished, but never expected to return alive; he had seen hundreds fall beside him, and an army that counted by thousands melt man by man away. He had wished to live, not for his own sake, but for the sister's, whose happiness was dearer to him than his own. When he

first went out to the East, it had been a long struggle; he could not be content to die and leave her, but as time passed he had learned a more entire acquiescence; he had accepted submission in lieu of doubt, and the conflict had its result in "perfect peace."

The twilight was gathering in the room, where these two sat, when Mr. Murray entered. His nephew rose.

"I must go to Edgeworth," and he left the room.

Her uncle came slowly up to where Maud sat. He took her hand, he looked pitifully in her face.

"My dear, what can I say but that you have been a daughter to me in all but the name, and your grief is mine?"

Maud flung herself into his arms, and softly, as if she had been a child, Mr. Murray wiped away her flowing tears.

"And you have forgiven poor Julian?"

It was nearly a year before Maud Bingley and Julian Murray were married. Their union had hardly taken place so soon, had not peace been declared. It had long been the first wish of Maud's heart to visit the spot, where, with all a soldier's

honours, Arthur had been sepulchred. And that was the wedding tour Julian had promised his bride, so soon as the opportunity should arrive.

Two carriages only waited in the narrow street, into which the vestry of St. James' church opens, for the marriage took place in London, and Mr. White was the only person not a relation invited to be present at the ceremony. One or two old acquaintance were in the gallery of the church to witness the spectacle; but there was none of the paraphernalia of a London wedding, except the costly lace, which was Mr. Murray's gift, and the bridal wreath, which Julian had petitioned Maud to wear, neither were there any tears. The ragged boys in the street raised a cheer when they caught sight of the bridegroom's empty coat-sleeve, and the old brass band, which had come uninvited, changed "Haste to the wedding," when they saw Julian's moustached and bearded face, into "See the conquering hero comes;" but the countenance of the new-made wife showed consciousness of nothing, save of the vows she had exchanged, the blessing she had received.

In a window of an hotel hard by, half-an-hour later, Maud stood listening to Edgeworth.

"I shan't go back to Bankside without you there,"

he said, "and it's hard to say when you will be home. I saw Ferrars yesterday; I used often to spend my vacations there in Haileybury days, and, every time I have been down there since, I have thought number four among the sisters has come best out of the crowd."

"Edgeworth," inquired Maud, "is this a sudden thought?"

"No," was the decided answer. "I made up my mind about six months ago, but I've not asked the young woman what she thinks about it yet. And I say, Maud, if you don't come back, you had better manage to meet Mrs. Edgeworth Bingley and myself somewhere in the Mediterranean. We must be up and off in three months, at latest."

His sister looked aghast.

"But I say, Maud," reiterated Edgeworth, "there is a sister about five years older, a good practical girl, and with but one fault, and that is she has thick ankles, still she is good-looking enough, and I have an idea she would be just the woman to bring Herbert to his senses."

Paton and Mrs. Paton on that day were in their glory. They were old married people themselves now, and the latter, who still with her new mistress went by the name of "Percival," had given dire

offence to Mrs. Murray, by preferring the yoke of matrimony to the heavy burdens she laid upon her.

Bridget had dressed her young lady that morning for the last time; she was going to start for Fintore, so soon as she had seen the bride and bridegroom off, there to take office as the head of Mr. and Mrs. Julian Murray's embryo establishment.

"My dear," she sobbed, "I'm too old to follow you into distant countries, but whenever it pleases God to take me, I shall die happy now. And, Miss Maud, I mayn't see Mr. Arthur's grave, but his will be the first face I shall hope to look upon in heaven."

There was no bustle on the quay at Balaklava, no martial sights or sounds upon the grassy steppes. Peace reigned upon the hills where the allied armies had encamped side by side, and golden crocuses grew in the footprints of the Light Brigade. But it was not to the spot where he himself had earned honour and renown, that Julian Murray led his wife. In one of the deep ravines nearer Sebastopol, one grave stands distinct from many around. A white stone cross tells who lies buried there, and when Arthur Bingley died and how. That is one record, but there is another even more

precious to the sister's yearning heart. It was the men of his own company, who, after they had followed him to his grave, placed those granite fragments round his lowly bed, lest careless feet should tread where they had laid the loved head of their young captain. And an old, grey-headed serjeant planted the shrub, whose purple blossoms fall in showers over the last resting-place of the good and brave.

THE END.

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